

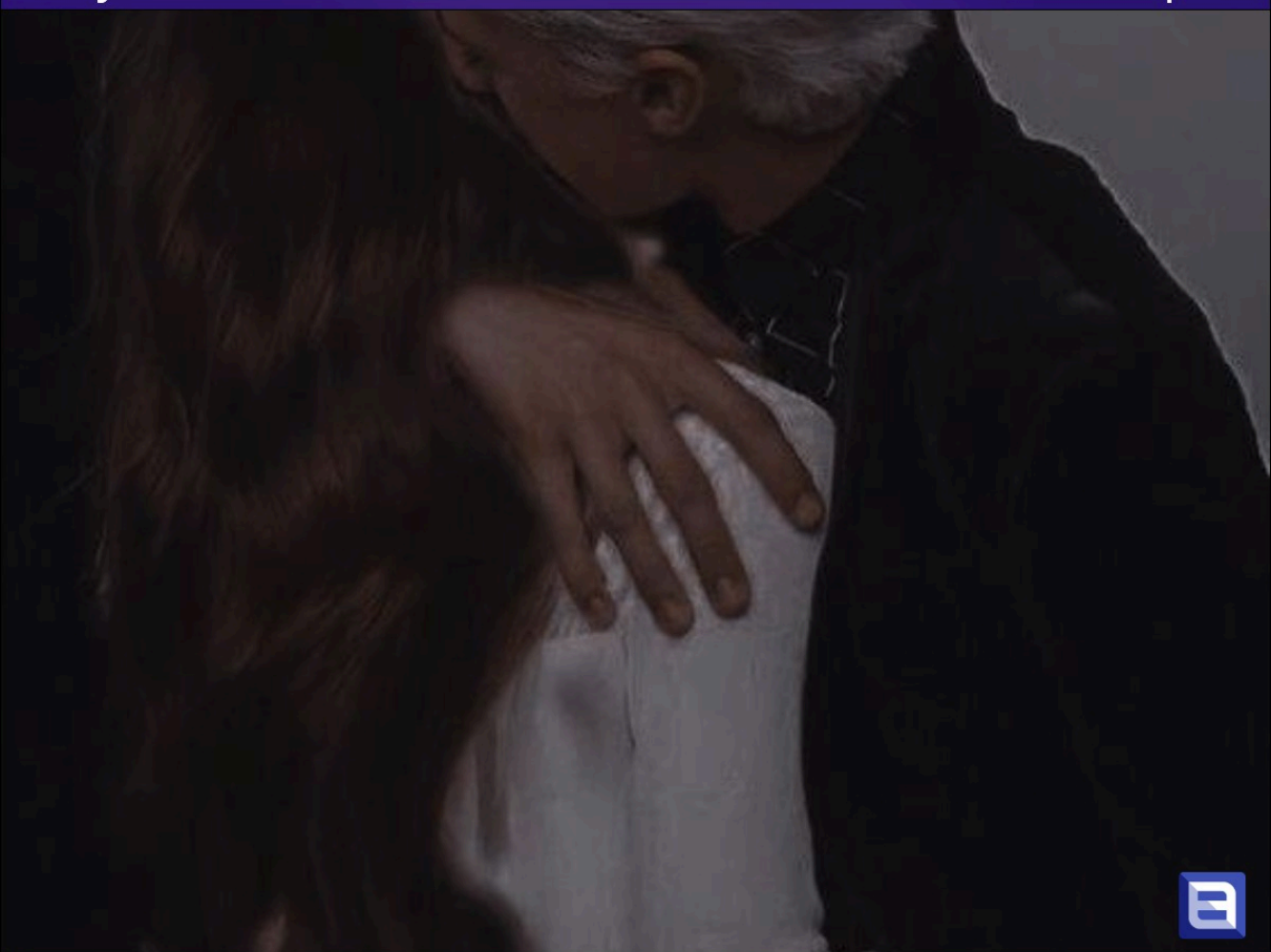
# The Slow Thaw

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camnz

Harry Potter

Complete



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## **The Slow Thaw**

**camnz**

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## Summary

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### Description:

Hermione is serving at Malfoy Mansion after the war was lost. In her bleak existence, she manages to find ways to cope. Contains nonconsensual. COMPLETE.

# Chapter 1

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## Chapter One

Hermione walked up the pebbly path towards Malfoy Manor. She had been ordered there, purchased or the like, whatever it is they do when they transfer their slaves. She had a small suitcase with her meagre belongings, including her sturdy shoes and two drab dresses. Everything else she owned had over time been taken away or destroyed.

The war was over and they had lost. They fought for a couple of years, more and more like fugitives as time went on. One by one they all fell. Harry, Ron, the other Weasleys and Order members. The ones left were in captivity in some form or other. Neville and Luna were around or so she had heard. Being a Gryffindor was not a good thing in these times, any that had survived were in hiding in the muggle world.

While their war was over, the war was still raging, with muggles now. Voldemort's plans to conquer the world was still in operation, but the muggles were putting up more of a resistance than the Death eaters had ever anticipated. Turns out the muggle weapons are quite fearsome in comparison to a wand so the Death eaters have had to adjust their tactics.

After capture, Hermione had been placed with a family up north. She wasn't quite sure where, she never really got to see much of the nearby countryside. If she left it was to follow her masters to Diagon Alley or some other pureblood family home. She'd served them for three years now. She fought in the beginning, but it only got her beaten and raped. Eventually she learned to cope by disconnecting completely and doing what she was told, no more no less. The jabs about her filth and her blood status didn't even register now, when they used to hurt her so much.

She had always been expected to perform sexual favours for the pureblood men in her house, which she did when told, but the Master at the last house in the end preferred his wife to the disengaged experience Hermione provided.

Now she had been posted to the Malfoys. She smiled a little thinking how this would have mortified her in the past. It would have been the worst possible outcome, but now she didn't care. One pureblood was the same as the rest in her estimation. She had been told to use the servants' entrance on her arrival and she found it pretty readily.

A house elf showed her into a large dark kitchen. There were five elves there preparing the lunchtime meal. The elf showed her to her room, which was a gray little room with a dirty old mattress. It had a tiny little window with bars on it. After leaving her things, she was guided to the Mistress, a Mrs. Narcissa Malfoy. Hermione had met her once before the war had started, but never since. The walk to the Mistress' drawing room took her upstairs and through part of the house. It was sumptuously furnished, with dark woods and dark coloured carpets strewn over the dark hardwood floors. There was a bit of dirt around that Hermione could see, no doubt she would have to set the house sparkling. The drawing room was lighter in colour and the beautiful woman was sitting at her desk writing on some parchment.

“You must be the new servant,” she said, barely looking up.

“Yes, Mistress,” Hermione replied.

“Good. This house needs some more hands. Your duties will be to clean the main part of the house and to serve meals. The elves do the meal preparation, so you don’t need to help with that. As well as any duties my husband and son assign you. Now the elves will show you where everything is. There is another girl here, a muggle girl who’s duties are predominantly related to my husband. I am sure you will meet her downstairs. You have run of the grounds when you are not busy, but are only allowed in the upstairs quarters when performing a duty.”

With that Hermione was dismissed. The elves dutifully showed her where all the cleaning products where, as well as the linen stores. Thankfully all linen and clothes were washed by a service. The kitchen wall had a map of the house on the wall with indicators of where the household members were presently. She could see Mrs. Malfoy’s dot in her drawing room, but there were no other dots there telling them that the other two were not in the house.

Before long, Hermione was scrubbing floors. She didn’t actually mind the work. It kept her occupied and made the days go quicker. As she scrubbed the heavy iron bracelet would sometimes clank against the brush. The bracelet was what kept her in line, her control mechanism. It ensured that she could not go anywhere they didn’t want her to go. It also ensured that she could not perform any magic even if holding a wand. Hermione’s wand had been lost the day she got injured. She was seriously injured when she was captured, but somehow there had been a sufficiently good enough healer on hand to make sure she didn’t die. In the beginning she had wondered constantly if it had not been better if she died that day, but she didn’t have those thoughts that much anymore.

Hermione kept simple pleasures in her heart these days. Nature, flowers, rain, bugs, birds etc. They treated her like an animal sometimes and when she was allowed out on her own away from people, she felt like one too. It was enough to subsist her.

She met the muggle girl, a Danish or German girl who’s name was Stina. Stina didn’t do anything in terms of the keeping of the house, she was Lucius Malfoy’s whore and that is all she did. He had given her nice things and clothes, but she still wore the iron bracelet just like Hermione did. Hermione knew straight away that they were not going to be friends. Stina was quite protective of her position in the house and Hermione certainly didn’t have any ambitions. In terms of status, they were pretty much on par. Hermione’s magical ability and training counted for nothing now.

The day crept on as it always did and soon it was time for dinner. Hermione knew how to serve dinner, she had done it countless times before. She would perform her duties perfectly, she always did. The start of the meal mean she had to bring the soup up. Hermione would do most of the work upstairs and pureblood did not like to see the elves. She backed into the room with the soup pot and placed it on the serving table.

“If it isn’t the mudblood,” she heard Draco say behind her.

Hermione did not respond but went to the head position occupied by Lucius Malfoy to stand there until he either indicated he wanted soup or waved her away. After filling his bowl, she did the same to Mrs. Malfoy. The soup was the only part of the meal where she would actually have to serve, the rest involved placing the dishes on the dining table and carving if

there was any meat to carve. Keeping the drinks flowing was the main focus of the job there after.

“Didn’t I always tell you this is where you would end up?” He continued laughing. “Answer me mudblood.”

“Yes you did,” she responded and replaced Mrs. Malfoy’s soup dish in front of her. Hermione had to answer questions posed to her.

She moved to stand next to Draco until he decided what he wanted to do about the soup course.

“Servitude looks good on you,” he said smirking in a way that was all too familiar. Hermione didn’t care. He wasn’t giving her direction, so she couldn’t leave.

“Draco, its bad manners to carry on discussions with the service staff,” Mrs. Malfoy said as a matter of fact.

“You mean slaves.” His eyes didn’t leave Hermione, whose gaze were fixed on the wall.

“You were told to mind your manners,” Lucius said calmly.

The old Hermione would have wanted to ask if he was still a Daddies boy, but she kept her eyes fixed and mind clear. Eventually Draco waved her away. The rest of the meal followed on. Lucius and Narcissa held a conversation and Draco predominantly watched Hermione. When the meal was over, they left the room and Hermione started to clear the dishes away.

The early evenings could be busy, particularly as alcohol holders needed to be refilled. Typically it would die off around nine. Getting called upstairs after nine was typically a bad thing. That was the time, however, when Stina waited downstairs to be called up. Hermione didn’t judge Stina or whatever comfort she got from her gifts and privileges. She didn’t begrudge anyone any comfort they could find in this world, even if they earned it on their knees.

When it was safe to assume she would not be needed anymore that evening, she retired to her room. She still had to clean it. She didn’t have to but she had learned to feel comfort in cleanliness. There was nothing she could do about the mattress beyond stringing it up and dusting it. After a good whacking, she covered it in the linen for the downstairs quarters. It was good quality upstairs linen with repaired tears or unwashable stains. She appreciated good quality linen.

It took her an hour to scrub the floor in her small room, but she did get years of dirt off the floor. It was after midnight when she was done, but she could allow herself a little time. She would not be required until the breakfast service, which was at seven. She allowed herself a cup of tea on the outside servants’ stairs before retiring for the night in her new home. A quick glance at the kitchen wall on the way back told her that all the Malfoys were in their respective bedroom, with Stina occupied in Lucius’.



## Chapter 2

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### Chapter Two

Hermione performed her breakfast chores and spent the rest of the day cleaning. There was still much of the house she hadn't seen. It was now late August and autumn was coming into full swing. Hermione watched the slow progression of the season's intensely. But today was a dark, stormy day. So dark, in fact that lights were required inside. It didn't matter, if she got the chance, she would go for a walk later. She re-fixed the bun that kept her hair permanently confined before heading upstairs to her next duty.

As she was scrubbing the floor in one of the first floor room, she heard the door open and close behind her.

"Here you are," Draco said teasingly. "I was looking for you. I actually had to go down into the kitchen to find you on the wall."

Hermione wasn't aware that her dot would show up on the map. Draco seemed to read her thoughts.

"Oh yes, you show up on the map if you are upstairs. Can't have you going somewhere you shouldn't." He walked over to the leather sofa and sat down.

"I am so happy you're here. I always wondered what happened to you, even thought of seeking you out at one time. And here you are. The fates are being good to me," he drawled while slowly crossing his feet in front of him. "You missed a stop."

"So I heard Potty and Weaselby bit it," he continued while Hermione continued to stoically scrub the floor. "No surprise there, they never had a chance. And you have now achieved the station you were destined for."

"Is there something I can help you with?" Hermione asked.

"Just inspecting." He slowly annunciating every word like she was a child. "All that study and all you really needed to know was your way around a washing pail."

With a laugh he got up and walked to the door, but before exiting he turned and said, "Hey, mudblood, I'm going to fuck you tonight. It actually cost us a bit to buy you. Might as well get our money's worth."

Hermione closed her eyes when she heard this. She had been hoping things would not develop in that direction, even though she always realised it probably would. What really disappointed her was that it took away her free time in the evening. Having sex with pureblood men was something to be borne in her position. Some learned to revel in it like she suspected Stina did, while she just gritted her teeth and bore it. It usually wasn't that bad, a blow job or a couple minutes of pounding and it was all over.

In the afternoon, she had to clean and re-organise Mrs. Malfoy's potions cupboard. At first glance it looked pretty tidy, but the dirt on the shelves had built up over years. Magical people

never really had the level of cleanliness that the muggle world did. Elves weren't the best cleaners and wizards were never going to clean. Hermione had to empty the shelves, scrub every surface then put everything back.

Mrs. Malfoy must have been happy with it because Hermione was not called back for a barrage of criticism, or maybe she just didn't care.

Before long, Hermione had to serve her second dinner at the house. Draco would occasionally give her little smirks to remind her of what was coming that evening. She did her job and there were no complaints. After dinner, she would share in the leftovers with the elves and occasionally Stina. If there weren't any they would go hungry, but they would typically make more than the family needed to ensure that there was enough left. Hermione had learned to keep a bit of a store in her room in case there wasn't enough, although this being the Malfoys that was unlikely to happen.

After dinner, Hermione stayed downstairs, sorting the clothing that had just been returned from the laundry service. Shortly after nine, she heard the chime that called her upstairs. As expected it was Draco that called her. She had to learn the way from the map on the wall, because she hadn't yet been to that part of the house.

Draco's room was large and dark like the rest of the house. As well as the bed and bathroom, the room also contained a seating area, a balcony and a desk. There was even a small bookcase near the desk area. The books would always have been a drawcard for her before the war, but she didn't read much anymore, there seemed little point.

"There you are," Draco said, from one of the chairs. "I bet you have been beside yourself in anticipation."

Hermione said nothing, but waited for instruction.

"Ah," he teased, "so you want to play games do you? Ok, I will play along. So answer the question mudblood."

"You did not ask a question, but no, I have not been beside myself in anticipation." Hermione responded.

"Don't get cheeky, it wouldn't be in your best interest," he said coldly, but then lightened his tone. "So how are you settling into your new home?"

"Fine."

"Take your clothes off."

Hermione did as she was told while he watched, smirking the entire time. When she was naked, she stood and waited for further instruction. Draco stood up from where he sat and came over to circle around her. He was much taller than her, still clothed in tight black pants and the tall black leather boots that came up to just under his knees. It was the typical uniform of the Death Eaters these days. He had removed the robes and was now in his white cotton undershirt. The dark mark tattoo slithered threateningly on his forearm. She didn't expect that he would undress, they never did. They could get called by the Dark Lord at any minute, so being in a state of undress was usually avoided by Death Eaters.

He stood behind her and searched her bun for the pins that held her hair in.

“You really are looking matronly these days, Granger,” he said while pulling the pins out and letting her hair loose. “Although with your hair, it might be just as well. It’s amazing that you never learned to manage it.”

He kept on circling her, looking at her naked body.

“Now what to do. The possibilities really are endless. Get on the bed.”

Hermione did as she was told and laid down on the bed, with its dark bedspread over the crisp white sheets. He followed her, stood and watch her lying on the bed before sitting down next to her. He didn’t look at her for a while, but instead lit a cigarette and smoked it.

Once finishing he turned around and stroked her body for a bit.

“Your hands are rough like a scullery maid’s. Oh, I forgot, you are a scullery maid. I don’t want you to touch me with those hams you call hands, do you hear.”

Hermione nodded and kept her eyes on the ceiling.

Draco played with her skin a little longer, teased her nipples and slowly trailed his fingers down towards her sex. The touches didn’t have much of an impact on Hermione, she didn’t really feel them. They weren’t repulsive, but she managed to keep her skin and her sex desensitized enough to equate the sensations to somewhere on par with shaking hands with a stranger.

Draco slid his finger through her folds and into her entrance.

“Why, mudblood, you are bone dry. Knowing you don’t want this just makes me harder,” he laughed. “I take it all the necessary charms are in place?”

Hermione nodded and kept her eyes on the roof, but felt Draco shift positions to kneel between her legs. His prods make her widen her legs a bit while he undid his zipper. He placed his arm next to hers as he leaned over and lined himself up to enter her. Her body protested his entrance as he had to prod his way in.

“You are unbelievably tight,” he groaned as he worked his way into her body. Eventually he had forced himself all the way in and placed his full weight on her. His breath grew ragged next to her ear as he pumped into her a few times. She knew this wouldn’t last too long. He increased the speed of his thrusts until he slammed into her one last time. He moaned loudly and bit Hermione’s earlobe fairly hard while he came. Hermione hoped that he wasn’t drawing blood, but wondered where she could find some disinfectant. She hoped they had some downstairs, because she wouldn’t be able to visit Mrs. Malfoy’s potion store at this time of night.

“Leave,” Draco ordered as he rolled off her. Hermione got up and dressed as quickly as she could. Draco was still lying on the bed. He was watching her, but didn’t say anything. Hermione left the room making as little noise as possible. She would have to change and clean up in her room downstairs. At least it had been fast, she thought, she’d even have time for a little walk around the grounds before crawling into her lumpy and slightly smelly bed.

She liked late night walks, sometimes it was all she could manage. They were always better when the moon was out so she was particularly glad that she would get away tonight. But they were worth it in pitch black and stormy as well. Storms had their own charms as the

wind violently ripped through the leaves, which were starting to turn and fall. Either way, she could forget about everything else and focus on the nature around her.

## Chapter 3

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### Chapter 3

Draco called her to his room every night and every night he had sex with her in some form or another. But the slow, forced starts had their limitation so he started to use some kind of lubricant, which extended his options a fair bit. He learned that asking Hermione to control the rhythm got something akin to the uncomfortable hopping of a lame horse. Hermione did as she was told and keep her eyes on the walls, or roof, or floor. He made no secret that he thought Hermione was the worst fuck in the world, which was just fine with her. The worse she was, the sooner they left her alone. He seemed to keep her longer each night. He had started to keep her naked afterwards for a while, either just standing or cleaning something, while he stayed in bed watching her. Seeing his own mess running down her legs seemed to please him immensely. Afterwards he would tell her how filthy she was.

“See, you’re a whore,” Draco said one night after he called her to his room. He was pulling out her hairpins again, releasing her wild hair from the tight bun at the nape of her neck. “You really should make an effort to be better at it, you were supposed to be quick on the uptake, mudblood. You tried so hard to convince everyone that you were. But you’re just not putting the effort in.”

Hermione wasn’t even really listening as Draco was soothing her hair with his hands. Her mind was elsewhere.

“Maybe we need to ensure that you don’t forget what you are,” he said teasingly. ‘I’ve got something for you.’ Walking over to his desk, he pulled out a piece of purple, shiny cloth from the drawer. “Put this on.”

He threw the piece to Hermione and she started to undress. The piece of cloth looked tiny, but it stretched much more than one would anticipate. It was bright purple, with a metallic sheen, so tight it showed her every curve. It was so low cut it practically showed off her navel and the front hem was puckered up to her crotch showing all of her inside thighs.

“That’s more like it,” he said brightly and came behind her holding her hips in front of the full-length mirror. “Don’t you look like a whore, mudblood?”

“Yes,” she responded to the direct question.

“See I don’t think you quite understand. Down on your knees.”

Hermione went down and Draco pushed her over until she was on all fours.

“I think you need to see.” He said and pulled up the tight skirt over her backside. He undid his zipper and lined himself up to enter her. The lubricant he applies made the entrance fairly fluid, but the deep penetration made her gasp as he hit her cervix. The noise seemed to please him and he smirked as he started to move in and out of her. Hermione fixed her gaze on the floor in front of her.

“Look at me, mudblood,” he ordered and Hermione did through the mirror in front of her.

He kept the eye contact for a while, but as he started getting closer to coming, he seemed to have trouble keeping the focus. Hermione watched as his face tensed up along with a last strong push that again hit her cervix hard enough to make her gasp. She watched as his face became slack and he slowly flopped down on her. She couldn't hold his weight so she laid down on the floor with him resting on top of her. His weight kept her pinned to the floor while he caught his breath. In the meantime, she had worked out that the floor contained somewhere between 180 and 220 rows of wooden floorboards. Looking him in the eyes made no difference to her. The pressure on the cervix was annoying and painful, but nothing more.

He was still breathing heavily as he pulled out of her and got up. He did up his zipper and walked over to his alcohol decanters.

"Now I think its best you keep that dress on all the time so you don't forget," he said as he poured himself a drink.

Hermione shimmied off the rug she was on. She was going to leak and she didn't want to leak on the silk Middle Eastern rug. She would have to clean it after all and it would be much easier cleaning it off the hardwood floor.

When he finally let her go, she grabbed her dowdy servants dress and made her way downstairs to her room. She changed into her nightgown taking the risk of removing the awful purple dress which barely covered half of her backside if she bent over. She would have to wear it tomorrow according to the orders she had been given. In the meantime, she had a good half hour to roam outside and forget everything. It was amazing how easily she could block everything out and get absorbed in nature, in all its beauty and mysteries. Her dreams had been horrible during and just after the war, but now she didn't really dream of much at all.

The Malfoys were all leaving early in the morning, so Hermione would likely be undisturbed most of the day. This meant no breakfast or lunch serving duty for Hermione.

Hermione's slutty dress angered Stina in the morning. Hermione couldn't guess why and didn't really bother to either. It did cling uncomfortably as she cleaned, but on the other hand, it kept her arms and legs free.

In the evening, Hermione had to serve dinner as the Malfoys returned. They had a guest as well, which was generally dreaded by Hermione and the elves. That meant there was less food to go around. The elves would automatically give up their portions for her and Stina and go with less or nothing. Hermione would claim that she wasn't hungry and stick to her small stash of dry food in her room. Stina certainly wouldn't give up any of her portion for anyone.

As Hermione brought the soup in, she noticed that the guest was Professor Snape. He was now the Headmaster at Hogwarts and Hermione had not seen him since the war.

"What are you wearing?" Narcissa demanded. Hermione started to answer, but Narcissa moved onto Draco. "Is this your doing?"

"I thought it would teach her some humility," Draco said.

"It is obscene. I will not have my servants dressed up as tarts," Narcissa yelled. "This is my house and I do not live in a brothel." She stood up abruptly with a loud scrape of her chair and used her wand to slam the dining room doors as she departed the room.

“You’ve upset your mother,” Lucius said coldly before turning to Hermione and ordering her to go change. Hermione put the soup bowl in place and left the room.

She returned to her room and changed into her normal dress before returning to the dining room to recommence her serving duties. There was an uncomfortable silence in the room as she entered, but their faces showed that there had been some heated discussion while she was gone.

She served Lucius’ soup first, then Draco’s and lastly Professor Snape. Narcissa did not return throughout the meal, but the conversation was turning to the war with the muggles. They were recruiting wizarding communities in other countries to join in the subduance of the muggle world.

“The colonies are out of course,” Lucius said. “Most of the wizarding communities in the new world have lax attitudes to the rights and superiority of wizardkind. Much of their communities spring from their mudblood ancestors anyway. The African are also proving difficult as they are so integrated, while the Middle Easterns hang onto their secrecy for dear life.”

“Well the Middle Eastern wizardkind need to stand up,” Professor Snape said. “It’s unacceptable the persecution they receive within the muggle communities there. Shameful really to bow to that.”

“The Scandinavians are also proving difficult, but we are coming along nicely in Russia and old Europe,” Lucius continued. “We’re not really sure how the Far East will align themselves yet, but we need to send more envoys to the Far East.”

Hermione carved the roast as the men talked. Throughout the meal she had to refill the wine jugs twice.

After the meal, Professor Snape gave her a quick nod as she cleared his plate, but the Malfoys ignored her completely.

The elves were busy cleaning up downstairs when she came down from the meal. The leftovers were laid out on the kitchen table waiting for her return. She took a small piece of the roast and excused herself to let the elves and Stina eat. She put the piece of meat on one of the hard bread pieces she had in her room. There was lots of food in the kitchen, but it all belonged to the Malfoys. They were only allowed the scraps and the food was charmed to ensure that no one else ate it.

Draco called for her around ten, which was late. It might make it too late for her to unwind out in the garden tonight.

“Where is the dress I gave you?” He asked abruptly as she entered the room.

“It is downstairs.”

“Well, go get it. I don’t ever want to see you in that ‘thing’ in my room, do you understand.”

“I understand,” she said and went downstairs to change and returned wearing the tight purple dress.

“That’s better,” he uttered as she returned. He came over and grabbed her around the jaw. “Now you belong to me and you always will, but you upset mother, so you will have to wear that monstrosity of a dress when you’re outside of this room.”

He let go of her and walked over to sit in one of the lounge chairs. She could tell he was tired tonight. Maybe he would let her go, then she could retreat to the garden.

“I want your mouth tonight,” he said while rubbing his eyes.

He didn’t look at her as she walked over and knelt between his knees. She undid her zipper and brought his cock out. She fingered it slightly to get him hard, then took the head in her mouth. She heard a great exhale from Draco as she did. The better she made this, the sooner she would go. She licked, sucked and teased until he tensed up completely. The leaves were falling outside and they covered much of the garden, and would crunch under her feet. Hermione was trying to avoid gagging, while he grabbed hold of her hair and massaged her scalp roughly with his finger knuckles. She knew the end was the potential for gagging as he’d try to get in deeper. His breathing told her that he was getting closer to the end and Hermione struggled to keep him off her reflex as he came.

“Is there anything else you need tonight?” she asked after a while of waiting.

He shook his head and Hermione escaped from the room as quick as she could.



## Chapter 4

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### Chapter 4

The days rolled on at the Manor. Draco called Hermione to his room every night and she would consistently do whatever was requested of her by any member of the household. She was back to wearing her normal dress, but had to change into the purple whore-dress when she went to Draco's room, where she spent increasingly more time. She had grown accustomed to the tight dress, she actually quite liked it. It was like a second skin and it made her feel less human, more like an animal comfortable in its own skin. She almost wished she could wear it all the time.

Draco had grown a bit more sullen. He had stopped constantly referring to her as a filthy whore and was just more sullen, but it didn't matter to Hermione one bit. Sometimes he asked her questions about Hogwarts, which she had to answer as they were direct questions. If there was any case for ambiguity she would say she didn't know. He asked her who her first was, which was Ron. Who her favourite teacher was. She didn't know. What her favourite food was from the Great Hall, which she didn't remember.

Mostly he would have sex with her. He didn't ask her to leave after, but said no when she asked if there was anything else he required. At which point Hermione would leave to escape out into the garden.

"I have a new dress for you," he said one night. 'I think you'll like it. I do.'

He pulled a dress out of a bag he had laying on the bed. It was a baby blue dress with white trimmings. It seemed a bit small, but Hermione tried to put it on. Draco watched as she struggled with the dress. It wouldn't fit over the iron bracelet.

"I can't get my arm in," she finally said. "It is too tight."

"It's not too tight. We are just going to have to remove the bracelet to get it on." He retrieved his wand and undid the bracelet, placing it on the bed.

With the bracelet off, the dress came on, but it was a tight fit. It fit tightly around her arms and chest, but flared out just below her chest down to mid-thigh. It looked like a little girl's dress, maybe something a three-year-old would wear to a wedding. Actually she had a Barbie doll what had something similar when she was little.

He walked around her and looked the dress over. "Do you like it?" He asked.

"I have no opinion," Hermione responded absently.

He was running his fingers along her waist, feeling the material and the curves underneath. Hermione could tell that his mind was moving towards sex.

"We need to do something about your hair," he said pulling his fingers through it, smoothing it down. He grabbed something else out of his bag. A black satin headband. She looked like the naughty version of Alice in Wonderland.

“That’s better. Now what can...” He stopped and winced. He rubbed his dark mark like it was causing him pain. “I have to go. Don’t go anywhere,” he said and apparated away.

Hermione stood in the quiet room for a minute before her eyes moved to the iron bracelet that was lying on Draco’s bed. Something was trying to break through her sluggish mind. Then her mind started bussing with the knowledge that there was nothing controlling her movements with the bracelet off. She could try to escape. She would probably be killed if she got caught, but this wasn’t living anyway so she had nothing to lose. Not that she really had anywhere to go. Her parents were long dead. She would be a threat to anyone who knew her, so she couldn’t look up anyone she knew even if she made it. But she could just melt into the muggle world, maybe even fight against Voldemort.

She listened for any sounds in the house, but it was quiet. The hall outside Draco’s room was quiet as well and Hermione didn’t run into anyone all the way downstairs. She went to her room and collected her brown coat to cover up the baby doll dress. She needed to go into the kitchen and check the wall to make sure where everyone was. She didn’t want Stina to see the dress, because it might draw attention right now in case she noticed the lack of a bracelet. She considered whether she needed to make an excuse for going outside, but thought it might just be better to just go without drawing attention to it.

Stina wasn’t in the kitchen, there were a couple of elves, but they went about their business. Lucius was in his study and his wife was in her dressing room. Draco wasn’t in the house. Hermione’s mind was working furiously. It had been a long time since she had engaged it properly. She moved towards the door and slipped outside. No one made any indication that anything was out of the ordinary so she continued walking up the stairs and out to the garden. Her going to the garden was nothing unusual, she did it every night. Once outside, she turned around and checked the windows to see if anyone was watching her, but as far as she could see no one was watching.

She walked quickly but quietly towards the bottom of the garden where the forest started. There was a gate that you had to pass through and Hermione fumbled slightly with the gate lock. The wards should not stop her, but there could potentially be an alarm if one of the servants left, but Hermione had never heard of anyone having one. The bracelets were pretty effective at keeping the servants confined. There was no going back if she passed through the gate. There were no explanations she could use for justifying being outside of the grounds.

Nothing happened when she passed through the gate. She closed the gate behind her in case someone would notice that it was open. She turned towards the forest and started walking. Her heart was beating uncontrollably in her chest and she had as much adrenalin in body to send little jolts through it. Her brain was screaming for more oxygen.

She didn’t know where the house was, but would keep walking south until she reached whatever muggle town she came across, then make her way to London. She should have taken some water she realised, but it might have looked suspicious.

When she was out of sight of the house she started running. She was out of shape, but the adrenalin kept her going. Once she was some ways away, she could rest and walk. She kept it up for a few minutes, but stopped abruptly when she was a shape shifting amongst the trees.

“Where are you off to, mudblood?” Draco said stepping out from behind the trees and striding towards her.

“No,” Hermione said, her mind searching for something to do. Draco had his wand so the options were limited. She could try to fight, but it would be pretty useless against his wand.

He came up and clasped his arms around her waist. He was laughing and Hermione was having trouble keeping her balance. She couldn't help but start to cry as the bitter disappointment was hitting home.

“You didn't think you'd get away did you. I told you, you're mine and you always will be. Silly girl. You are never going to leave here.”

Hermione's mind was still overloading. He shouldn't be here. He was called. He should be somewhere else. Why was he here.

“You never left,” Hermione said as she realised that he was toying with her. “You planned this.”

He roughly turned her around to face him. “I wanted to see what you would do,” he said softly and wiped the tears off her face. “But here you are. See I knew you were in there somewhere and here you are.”

“Fuck you, Malfoy,” she yelled.

“Language,” he said teasingly. “I knew I could draw you out. You can't hide from me.”

He kissed her roughly on the mouth, but Hermione bit him. He laughed again and apparated them back to his room.

“Don't fight me Granger. Actually you can if you want to, but it won't make much difference.”

She knew he was right. She had gotten her hopes all up and now she needed her barrier back, the barrier that made her completely indifferent. She tried to pull in back, but she couldn't stop crying.

He was kissing her again. “No more tears now,” he said as he was taking her dress off.

No, no, Hermione thought, not now. He was pulling her towards the bed. She knew that fighting would not change the outcome, so she just complied. The barrier was the only way to cope with this.

“No more tears.” He said gently and stroked them away, but Hermione couldn't stop the tears from flowing. As hard as she tried, she couldn't get her barrier back either, it just wouldn't fit over her emotions. She felt every touch in a way she normally couldn't.

He was amazingly gentle with her and Hermione knew there was comfort in the touches if she let it comfort her, but she would never, ever seek the comfort in there. Not from him. Ever. She would never be like Stina who'd grown to want it; the only comfort available to her. Hermione would never go down that route. She might have to put up with anything, but she would never be a willing party to it.

Afterwards, Draco pulled her to him and kept her against him as he slept. Hermione couldn't sleep, but after a while she calmed down. She had to clear her mind to get the barrier to fit properly again.

## Chapter 5

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### Chapter 5

Hermione didn't know where she was in the morning. It had been a very long time since she woke up next to somebody or even warm for that matter. She snuck out of the bed and put on her baby doll dress. Draco was awake by the time she had stepped out of the bed.

As she went to leave, he stopped her.

"Can't forget your bracelet. We both know you can't be trusted, don't we." He pulled out his wand and made the bracelet fit around her wrist. Hermione didn't like his touches around her wrist and wanted to pull it back, but she refrained. She had to get back to where she was, where nothing affected her. She still wasn't there yet, but she would work on it during the day.

"I can't get the dress off with the bracelet on," Hermione said quietly.

"And why should you need to." Draco responded. "I will take it off for you when you need to."

"What if you're not here?"

"Then you're going to have to wait."

I can always cut the dress off if I need to, Hermione thought defiantly. She started to walk off to start preparing for the breakfast service.

"I want you here when I get back this afternoon," Draco called after her.

"I have duties," Hermione said.

"I will tell you what your duties are. You are mine, mudblood, you will perform whatever duties my mother gives you after you fulfil mine. Is that understood?" He said, he was starting to get angry.

"Yes," Hermione said and quietly left. She could only go by what they told her, she would let them sort out whatever power struggle was going on between the household members. It didn't matter. Hermione was pleased that her indifference was starting to return.

In the afternoon, Hermione was cleaning the windows on the lower floor. She had managed to calm her mind fairly well. What Draco had done was cruel and she was stupid for not having suspected that he was playing games with her. She would not be so stupid again. The repetitive work was helping her set her thoughts in order.

When she had worked herself around the corner of the house, she was a man in the garden. She had never seen anyone in the garden before. The household members, as far as she knew, never really ventured out there. The man was facing away from her tending to some of the shrubbery. He had brown hair and was fairly skinny. Something struck her as familiar, but there was no one in the household like him. He turned slightly as he worked. Neville.

Hermione ran to the nearest door and flew outside. “Neville!” she yelled as she ran towards him.

Neville looked up in shock and was nearly bowled over by Hermione’s forceful bear hug.

“Hermione. Is that you?” he asked.

Hermione hung onto him for the longest time. Her emotions were all in uproar again after she had spent the whole morning trying to calm down. She was even crying again.

“How have you been?” she finally asked.

“Good. I tend gardens. I was always good at Herbology at school. Turns out I’m a good gardener too.”

“Do you live here?” she asked, confused as she had never seen him.

“No, I live with the Froshters, but they share my services with other families. I come here a couple of times a week to tend to the garden. Do you live here now?”

“Yes, I serve here,” Hermione admitted. She had to hug him again.

“You’ve lost so much weight, Neville.”

“So have you Hermione,” he said quietly. “How have you been?”

“All right. Better now that I’ve seen you.”

“They’re not treating you badly, are they?”

“As can be expected,” Hermione said.

“I bet Draco is a right shit.”

“Yeah, well, nothing new there.”

They sat behind one of the shrubs and talked for a bit before Neville told her that maybe she should go before someone noticed she was gone.

“It is so good to see you, Neville.”

“I’ll be back in a couple of days,” he promised.

“I’ll come and see you then,” Hermione said brightly before walking back to the house. Normally no one really paid attention to where she was as long as the duties got done, but with Draco’s orders to be there when he got back, she needed to make her way up to his room.

Draco wasn’t back yet, so Hermione sat down in one of the chairs. The house was completely quiet. One of the elves must have made Draco’s bed when she was downstairs doing her serving duties. So much for getting the barrier back in place, she thought to herself. Seeing Neville had brought it crashing down again. She had to calm down, she told herself, clear her mind. But it was hard. Seeing Neville had brought so much back. She would see him again in a couple of days too.

He had gotten so thin and tall, but he still had that kind face that she had always loved. Compared to Draco, who was also tall, but he had grown harder and colder. Draco still had

some of the youthful features to his face, but there was something aging in his eyes as well. She didn't want to think about Draco as he was. She didn't even want to think of him as he is.

She could hear him coming now. She knew the sound of the long black boots he wore. She stood up and waited.

"Good. You're here," he said as he entered the door. He had blood on him. It was speckled on his white shirt, so it must be on his robes and pants as well. 'This will need to be cleaned.' He dropped his robes on the floor. "Run me a bath."

Hermione went into the bathroom and started the water as Draco undress, leaving his clothes in a pile on the floor. When she stopped the water, he came in and stepped into the bath. He was completely naked.

"Get me a drink," he ordered. "And then come rub my feet."

Hermione did as she was told. She got him a whiskey from the decanters in the bedroom and gave it to him, then sat down at the end of the bath, where he placed his soak foot in her lap.

"The Dark Lord is very annoyed," Draco said, looking at her as she started to rub the foot that was soaking her dress. "It turns out the muggles have found some way of rooting out the people that we've imperiused. All the people we have placed within the government and the military have started to disappear. Who knew the muggles were so clever. We can't definitely say who is under the Imperius curse, but somehow the muggles have worked out how to detect it. They have practically removed all of our resources within the muggle world. I bet you know how they do it."

"I don't," Hermione said and continued to massage.

"Maybe the Dark Lord should question you about it. I'd bet you'd sing like a canary." He was amused with his own dark thoughts. "But then you'd probably won't come back, and we can't have that can we."

Death threats were something Hermione was used to. They didn't worry her too much, nothing had ever come of them and even if it did, ending this awful existence wasn't something she would necessarily fight if the event arose.

"Get me a towel. I need to get out. I have to speak to father. I think you need a bath. I like you nice and clean. Get in." He said while pulling out his wand and taking off her bracelet. He waited with his towel wrapped around his waist while she got undress, then put the bracelet back on. Hermione climbed into the bath while he watched and stayed while he went into the bedroom and got dressed.

"I'll be back before dinner to dress you," he said and left the room.

Hermione drained the bath and refilled it. The thought of being in the same water as him was revolting. Hermione stayed in the bath until the water got cold. It had been a very long time since she had a hot, leisurely bath. Mostly she had to wash herself with cold water and a washcloth. She normally had to use soap to clean her hair, which didn't do anything good to the condition of it. Draco had expensive shampoos and all sorts of conditioners.

She chided herself for being so ridiculous and thinking about things like conditioning her hair. She shouldn't care what her hair looks like.

Hermione's hair was dry by the time Draco returned. She was still sitting in a towel waiting to put her clothes back on. Once she was dressed, she pulled her hairpins out of the little pocket she had made in the hem of the dress, and pulled her hair into a tight bun. She had learnt to take the bun out before entering Draco's room in the evenings because if he pulled her hair out, she would never get the pins back and she was down to her last two.

The dinner service was long tonight. The Malfoy's had guests again, which meant reduced rations downstairs. The guests were two Death eaters that Hermione didn't know. Mrs. Malfoy gave Hermione a frozen look when she saw the new dress, and Draco and his mother exchanged meaningful looks about it. In the end, Mrs. Malfoy ignored it.

They were also talking about the loss of their muggle agents and informants. They speculated that there must be a person or a group of people responsible and if they could be found then they could circumvent the whole process.

"Going back and recruiting more agents has risks though. We've lost two of our men who went into the muggle military to recruit. Neither has been seen since, although I am sure that if they are alive, they would never give any information away," Lucius said.

"Like it matters. They're only muggles, what would they do with the information anyway. Even if they knew everything about us, what could they possibly do," one of the guests said flamboyantly.

Lucius looked less convinced than either of the guests. "It is still not a good idea to have them privy to any information about us."

None of them paid her any attention and Hermione stayed to clean up when the family and their guests moved to one of the entertaining rooms for their port and after dinner cigars.

After clearing the plates, Hermione waited in the garden for the guests to leave. She couldn't really relax because the night was likely not over for her. Draco would call her as he always did and she might not have time to go into the garden again. The lack of her own time was grating on her. She needed that time to decouple and create the abstracts in her life that supported her.

Draco did call. Hermione could tell that he was tired again, which was good because it would be quick. He was partially undressed already and indicated her over to the bed.

"You smell lovely," he said. "I should make you have baths every day, I think. Maybe after dinner, you should go have a bath and wait for me."

He was a little drunk and Hermione could smell alcohol and cigars on his breath. He proceeded to take her dress off and after replacing the bracelet, he nudged her into bed.

Sex was quick tonight. A few long, smooth thrusts and he was just about spent. He groaned into Hermione's ear with each thrust and bit her on the join of her shoulder and neck as he came. Not so bad, Hermione thought. She wasn't quite as detached as before but neither was it the complete intrusion it had been the previous evening. The barrier was weak but it was doing an adequate job.

He ordered her to stay when she made to get out of bed. She rolled back into bed and lay there staring at the ceiling. Draco fell asleep with his arm over her waist. Hermione knew that she would have to stay until morning again. She felt resentful that her time in the garden was being waylaid. She would rather have her time in the garden than a warm bed to sleep in, if the choice was this bed.



## Chapter 6

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### Chapter 6

Hermione slept fairly well with Draco beside her, but they were woken up in the morning by Mrs. Malfoy walking into the room. As she saw them, or rather Hermione, she stopped in her tracks.

“It’s unseemly to have servants sleeping in your bed, Draco,” she stated coldly.

“You need to learn to knock mother,” Draco returned while sitting up.

“Haven’t you got duties,” Mrs. Malfoy snapped at Hermione, who scrambled out of bed and tried to dress, but had to stop when her bracelet wouldn’t let her finish. Draco walked around to removed and replaced the bracelet.

“I would like her to wear appropriate servants dresses,” Mrs. Malfoy said.

“This dress is more than appropriate for the duties she serves,” Draco said salaciously.

Mrs. Malfoy made a loud huff, before saying that Lucius wanted to speak to him before breakfast.

Hermione rushed downstairs to prepare for the breakfast service. Breakfast was a rushed affair as the men were about to head off somewhere. There wasn’t much talk, but Draco was clearly excited about the day. Mrs. Malfoy was nervous as she was every time Draco spent the day on missions with his father.

Hermione spent the rest of the morning polishing one of the main staircases in the house. The wood was beautiful, but it had been neglected for some time. Hermione managed to make the wood gleam beautifully again. She actually liked working on it. It wasn’t the staircases fault it was stuck in this house serving this god awful family. It was stuck her just as much as she was. But she could restore it to its intended glory.

At lunchtime she had to bring Mrs. Malfoy her lunch in her sitting room. The beautiful woman looked up as Hermione quietly entered the room. She watched Hermione as she placed the tray on the small table that served Mrs. Malfoy’s meals when she was alone.

“My son seems quite taken with you,” she said as she walked over to the table. “It will pass, but you provide him with some measure of comfort for the moment.”

Hermione didn’t say anything, but continued to serve up the bits and pieces of the meal service.

“It is difficult times and they do seem to need comfort to cope with the difficult tasks they must perform,” she continued and Hermione got the feeling that these were thoughts Mrs. Malfoy had developed some time ago. Hermione didn’t particularly care to listen while Mrs. Malfoy prattled on. “... they seem to require attendance for the baser parts of their beings. They are but men in the end. I suppose I have to accept that my son is no longer the boy I have always known, but a man now with base urges.”

As Hermione was done, she went to leave, but Mrs. Malfoy stopped her in a steely voice. "I'll remind you girl, that my son may make use of you for a while, but don't forget that you are but a servant and he will soon grow tired of you."

Hermione nodded to let the woman know she understood. Sooner rather than later, she thought to herself.

She searched the garden for Neville in the afternoon. He wasn't there. He wasn't supposed to be but she looked anyway. She still spent around half an hour in the garden, she had a feeling that there wouldn't be any more garden visits until Draco had tired of her. It might be quite soon, the novelty of her humiliating position and the power he had over her would probably be wearing off soon.

In the afternoon, Hermione was cleaning the music room. Some of the instruments looked like they were centuries old. None used in the last 50 years. Some had so much dust inside they were practically useless. After an hour scrubbing, Draco burst through the door.

"I hate it when you're not in my door when I get home," he said angrily.

"I didn't know..." she started, but couldn't finish her sentence as Draco roughly grabbed her and bent her over the pianoforte. Hermione tried to remain passive, but his hand in her hair was hurting her. Although that was not anywhere near the pain she felt when he yanked down her underwear and entered her from behind. The pain was searing and intensified with each rough thrust accompanied by growling grunts. Hermione's hipbones were roughly grazing against the wood of the piano underneath her and the pain was bringing tears to her eyes. She didn't notice him finishing, other than the slow let up off the pain. He was lying on top of her gathering his breath back.

"I don't know what I would do if you weren't here," he said between breaths.

I don't know, Hermione thought to herself, maybe rape someone else.

"I hate this fucking war," he continued. "I hate everything about it."

He slowly pulled out of her and went to zip himself up. Hermione stayed where she was. She didn't want to look at him. She hated him at this moment. All the things he did to her before, she didn't hate him, she was totally indifferent, but now she hated him. And she had started talking back in her mind too. She wasn't pleased. Hate wasn't indifference and it was indifference she needed.

He was saying something else, but she wasn't paying attention. She reckoned she would be in pain all day and that was good. Pain was dehumanising.

She was right, she was in pain all day. Her hip bones had deep purple bruises on them, not to mention her poor abused insides. She was practicing her indifference all evening. Dinner was a quiet affair. Lucius was clearly tired and disappointed about the day. Draco was still seethingly angry. Mrs. Malfoy was quietly relieved that her small flock was safely home.

"Isn't it time you start looking for a bride, Draco?" she said brightly trying to lighten the mood.

"We're in the middle of a war mother. Not exactly the time for weddings."

“Nonsense,” Mrs. Malfoy continued. “It is the perfect time for a celebration. And it would be good for you to have someone look after you.”

“I am perfectly adequately catered for in that department, mother.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. A servant can never bring the comfort that a wife can,” she countered.

“Mother,” Draco said exasperatedly.

“Your mother is right,” Lucius said. “Maybe it’s time you start looking at securing an heir.”

“I’m not fucking getting married,” he yelled. “I have enough to worry about to have to run around some insipid girl whose main aim in life is to clear Diagon Alley of all material substance.”

Draco made a show of losing his appetite and left.

There wasn’t much talk between the other two afterwards. Lucius eventually excused himself and left as well.

Hermione took her ordered bath after dinner. She had been bleeding a bit and her bruises were absolutely raw. She struggled to suppress her disgust and hatred. Having Neville around wasn’t going to help either. She loved seeing him and it made her happy, more dreaded emotions. Maybe she was reacting so strongly now because Neville was around. But she wasn’t sure she would trade Neville for complete indifference. If she was indifferent these things would not bother her at all, there were no relevant choices, no tradeoffs, no hope.

Draco was sitting at his desk reading some papers while she was bathing. It was completely quiet with the only sound being scribbles from his quill and the clunk of his whiskey glass whenever he returned it to the table.

When she returned to the bedroom wrapped in the black towel, he called her over to him and made her stand between his knees.

“All clean and warm,” he said as he gently tugged the towel until it fell. He was gently stroking her thighs with his fingers. One of his hands moved to the dark purple bruise on her hips.

“I hurt you,” he said matter of factly. “My mother always chided me for damaging my toys.”

He pulled out his wands and healed both of the bruises.

“Merlin I want you tonight, but I will let you heal,” he said in a husky voice.

Instead, Hermione had to take him in her mouth. He made a great shuddering exhale as she took the head in her mouth. His entire body was tensing under her administrations. He begged her to fondle his balls, and she could only comply. As he was getting closer, he told her that he wanted her to swallow. His breath was becoming rougher and faster as he got closer, but she could hear him gritting his teeth as he came. She swallowed, but wanted to throw up out of disgust. She chided herself for her lack of indifference. Her barrier was just a thin replica of what it was and she needed to do a much better job of rebuilding it. Afterwards he led her

over to the bed and made her get in while he undressed. Once completely stripped, he pulled her naked body to him and settled down to sleep.

Hermione stayed awake for a while. She could hear his breathing slow down and deepen as he fell asleep. She still hated him. She couldn't understand him. He full on raped her, then snuggled up to her like she was his teddy bear. He wasn't humiliating her anymore, maybe because she didn't respond. She had thought this was about her, but lately it seemed to have been about him. He really was seeking comfort in her. Now he even fed his anger into her. He was turning to her when he was feeling good and he was turning to her when he was feeling bad. She wasn't entirely sure where in the process of him getting tired of her this fit into. Something was telling her that things may be going in the opposite direction, even though she did her best to be, as he said, 'the worst fuck in the world'.

## Chapter 7

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### Chapter 7

Hermione found Neville in the garden the next day. They sat for a while and talked, and Hermione couldn't stop smiling while they were together. Neville was just as kind and gentle as always and his time in servitude hadn't done anything to change him. He had an unquestionable faith that everyone would eventually come to their senses, but he still held a deep sorrow for what had happened to people. Neither of them wanted to talk too much about people who were gone, it was easier to focus on the good things that still existed, like the late autumn roses that were still hanging in there.

Neville focused entirely on his gardening and Hermione could completely understand the attraction. Nature was simple, uncomplicated and soothing. It demanded nothing and gave everything.

She could only stay with Neville for a while before he got concerned that she would be in trouble if she was away for too long. Likely she would, but she didn't really care. But equally she didn't want him to be anxious so she went back inside the house to resume her duties.

There were guests for dinner again. Hermione served the soup to all the family and guests before turning her attention to the wine service. They were all drinking heavily tonight.

"The Dark Lord is furious," one of the guests said. "He should go over there and smyth them all for their cowardice."

"Although it is understandable that they do not want to be distracted with a war with muggles when their neighbours have been seeking any chance to overthrow them for five centuries," Lucius said. "This would provide the perfect opportunity for the whole region to implode."

"Subduing the muggles is in all of our interest, they should lay aside their petty squabbles for the greater good," the female guest said. "We will all be rewarded in the end. The Dark Lord will reward them."

"Perhaps it is hard to put your faith in someone so far away," Lucius mused.

"Sounds like you're having issues with faith, Lucius."

"Not at all, I am just playing devil's advocate."

The dinner droned on for a while, with a long diatribe from one of the guests at the complete gutlessness of the new world wizarding communities for not supporting the cause.

Draco was enjoying the conversation, smirking as the guest described the abusive language he had used when confronting some of the German wizarding leaders, and reconfirming how ugly their women were. The whole table was astounded that the German wizarding community was referring to some muggle event that happened sixty years ago as the reason they could not condone the cause, how utterly ridiculous.

The guests all left to enjoy their port, leaving Hermione to clean up. After the table was clear, she returned to Draco's room for her bath. He followed shortly to help her undress and stayed to watch from the doorway as she climbed into the bath. Surprisingly he wasn't drunk. He was watching her body in the water. She wrapped her arms around her chest to cover herself.

"I won't tolerate sharing your affections."

Hermione wasn't entirely sure what he was talking about.

"You never had my affections," she challenged.

This brought a small smile to his lips.

"Withstanding," he drawled. "I have you and I won't share you. Not with the pool boy, the milkman or the gardener."

Understanding dawned on her, he was referring to Neville. He had seen them together in the garden. Hermione could only glare at him. Her mind had never flowed in that direction, it was Neville for god's sake. There had never been anyone who was more like a brother to her.

He pushed himself off the door frame and turned to leave. Hermione could hear him leave the bedroom and return to the guests downstairs. Hermione stayed in the bath until the water cooled. Once she got out, she dried herself off and wrapped one of the large duvets round her. The nights were starting to get a real chill to them. She should light a fire, but she couldn't be bothered.

Draco returned an hour later. He had sex with her and then he fell asleep with his fist knotted in her hair.

Neville wasn't in the garden a few days later. Hermione realised that Draco had gotten rid of his service. He wouldn't be coming back. She felt the loss sharply, but the benefit of the sorrow and loss was that her barrier was returning in full force. Within six hours, she felt nothing.

Draco was watching her throughout dinner service. Hermione kept her eyes on the wall, occasionally checking the wine glasses to see if they needed refills. Professor Snape was dining with them tonight, but Hermione did not pay attention to any of the conversation. Instead she noticed a mistake in the wooden carving above the central fireplace. The carver had tried to cover it up, but it was still visible to someone paying attention. It was probably a secret between her and the carver. The Malfoy's would never have tolerated the mistake if they knew about it.

After dinner, Draco helped her undress for her bath. Hermione got in and lay in the warm water. She didn't care that he was watching her. A couple of days ago, it would grate her, but she was back to blissful indifference. As much as she loved Neville, maybe this was for the best.

"Got out," Draco ordered and Hermione complied. 'I think you're hiding from me again,' he said slowly. "We can't have that can we."

He watched her impassive face. "What would you like me to do for you?" she said distantly.

“No you don’t,” he replied teasingly, “I need you present and accounted for.”

He pulled her hair back until her whole head was tilted back in level with his. “You’re not going to hide from me,” he said as close to her face as he could be without kissing her. She felt his breath on her lips, but it didn’t bother or concern her. Any lightness he had a moment ago was gone. He took one of her nipples between his fingers and squeezed. It hurt immensely, but Hermione didn’t respond. He could rape her again if he wanted, it would mean anything to her now. He let go of her with a sound of disgust and walked over to the liquor decanters. Hermione wrapped a towel around her and waited for instruction. He was sitting in one of the large chairs watching her while taking a large swig of whiskey.

“You were so prissy in school. Always with your hand up. So desperate for attention. You drove the boys crazy. Did you know that?”

Hermione wasn’t listening.

“All wondering if you’d ever give it up. I knew that I’d have you one day.”

He placed the drink down on the table, came over and slapped her hard. Hermione literally did see stars, but she had been here before a number of times in the last three years. Being beaten up didn’t phase her. They could do their worst and it would never phase her.

He was getting angry now. Hermione could well foresee a beating in the next few minutes, but instead he dragged her over to the bed and threw her down on it.

“I won’t have you hiding from me.” He repeated and placed his hands around her neck. He began to squeeze her throat until her air and blood supply was shut off. She focused on the pain for a minute but before long her survival instincts were kicking in. She was starting to panic and clawed at his arms. She found that she was staring into his eyes, pleading to let her breath.

“There you are,” he said, satisfied. He refused to lose eye contact with her. Hermione was coughing and spluttering, her throat aching from the pressure he had put on it. She could feel his erection on her belly, but he wouldn’t lose eye contact even as he unzipped and lined her up. He worked his way into her, the whole way keeping her focus on him. This wasn’t about pleasure or getting off like it normally was, Hermione realised. He wasn’t particularly lost in his own enjoyment. This was a statement. Although after a bit, the pleasure seemed to overtake him and he couldn’t keep the eye contact anymore. He came with long raggedy breaths before collapsing on her, his full weight pinning her down into the mattress.

He sat up and undressed before returning naked to the bed. Hermione’s emotions were released and bouncing around her head. She hated him for intruding on her mind, there wasn’t much she could do about the body, but it was the intrusion into her mind that hurt. She couldn’t quite understand why it was important to him.

The next morning, the barrier was back. She went through the whole day in blissful indifference. The night repeated fairly similar as the night before except this time he held her under in the bath until she started to struggle. She swore at him when he finally released her and her curses made him smirk. In the morning again, the barrier was back.

By the end of the fifth day, Neville was back and with Neville back, Hermione couldn’t keep the barrier in place. Whatever kind of battle they had just had, she had won, but the prize

may cost her much in the end.



## Chapter 8

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### Chapter 8

The next morning was typical except the men were again preparing for some excursion, which made Mrs. Malfoy take on the fake cheeriness that revealed she was quite nervous. They left shortly after breakfast, which left the house fairly quiet.

Hermione got on with her chores. It was raining so she didn't spend much time outside. Neville wasn't there today. She ate lunch downstairs with the elves once Mrs. Malfoy had finished. She didn't think she had said a single word all day. She only really spoke with Neville and her voice was starting to recover from the slight rasp it had picked up over the last few years from the general lack of use.

The weather seemed to darken quite dramatically in the afternoon. She had stood in one of the window bays and watched it roll in for about half an hour. As she was returning to work, a commotion was breaking out downstairs. She stood and listened for a while. She wouldn't go unless she was called. It wasn't any of her business and she didn't really care anyway. She heard the little bell calling her a minute later and started to head downstairs. There were mediwizards coming in through the fireplace and even Professor Snape was running.

"You," Professor Snape said, "Go get some towels. Quick girl."

Hermione understood that Draco had been hurt. She could tell from Mrs. Malfoy's expression. A look of utter horror and grief and Hermione suspected the woman could not call it if it had been her husband. Hermione turned and headed towards the linen cupboard. The Medi wizards' rush indicated that the injury was fairly serious. Maybe he was dying. Did she hope he would die, she wondered. She acknowledged that it would be a relief to her if he did, but was she prepared to wish him dead?

She had no idea of the kind of things he did when he left here, he could well deserve to die. She certainly thought so when he had let the Death Eaters into their school to kill Dumbledore. She returned upstairs with an armful of towels. Professor Snape took them from her and told her to go to the potions store for a list of ingredients.

She did as she was told and returned. She was told to stay out in the hall in case they should need something.

"You promised me he wouldn't get hurt." She could hear Mrs. Malfoy strained voice.

"There was an unexpected ambush," Lucius Malfoy's clipped tones responded.

"How could you let this happen? You promised me," Mrs. Malfoy continued but Draco's pained cry drowned out any response. She could hear Mrs. Malfoy starting to sob.

Hermione didn't know how to feel. Part of her wanted to feel sympathy for a human being in pain, but part of her thought he deserved every ounce of pain. It would be devastating for Mrs. Malfoy to lose her son, but it had been equally devastating from all the parents of her Gryffindor schoolmates when the civil war was at its height. She decided that it was easiest to

not feel anything at all. Instead she turned her attention to towards the garden and let her mind dwell there.

Draco's cries went on for a while, then quieted. Eventually Lucius left. His faced was strained, but haughty as always. Then Professor Snape came out carrying a wrapped up Draco with Mrs. Malfoy in tow. The mediwizards left as well. No one paid her any attention, which suited her fine. She didn't make eye contact with anyone. Obviously he was going to survive. Again, Hermione felt confusion about whether she was glad or disappointed. Beside Neville, he was the only person she really knew in the world, even though he was horrible on every possible level.

She went in to clean up the room. There was a good amount of blood. The towels were soaked and discarded, the settee had a large patch soaked into the green damask. There were also pools on the floor. She piled up the towels and carried them downstairs to return with a bucket and sponge to clean up the ruby red blood on the floor. Some had gotten on the silk carpets, which would be difficult to get out. So this is what all the fuss was about, she thought. Blood. Nothing special about it. It smelled metallic, was sticky and she hated having her hands in it.

There was nothing she could do about the settee. It would have to be destroyed. Maybe she could start a bonfire on the grounds and burn it. If she had a wand, she could just vanish it, but those days were long gone.

The elves came up to help her move the settee outside and carry the large rolled up carpet downstairs. She spent the next two hours scrubbing blood out of the carpet, then had to serve dinner. Draco wasn't in his usual seat, but Professor Snape was staying. Mrs. Malfoy eyes were puffy and red from crying. There wasn't any conversation at all and hardly anyone ate. They could feast downstairs tonight, but Hermione knew that the elves would be too upset to eat. It would fall on her and Stina to clear a much as they could.

Hermione ate all she could and even filled up her little food store. To her surprise, Draco called for her. She went upstairs to Draco's room. He was lying on his bed without his shirt. She could see healing wounds all across his chest and belly. They were starting to knit but they were still looking fairly raw. Bright red slashes contrasting against his white skin.

"You should go lie down, Mother. You're overwrought."

"How could I possibly sleep when you are injured," she said ready to start crying again. The strain still making her voice high pitched and nasal.

"I'm fine, Mother. Go lie down. The mudblood will take care of me."

Mrs. Malfoy noticed her presence in the room and looked back at Draco.

"Go sleep," he continued. "I'll see you in the morning."

After a moment, she nodded and swept out of the room.

"She's not very good with injuries," he said to Hermione when his mother had left. "When I was little, she would call over the entire senior staff of St Mungo's every time I got a papercut. You will need to swab the wounds with salve."

Hermione sat down on the bed and picked up a piece of cotton. He didn't react when she touched one of the wounds. He must be on some kind of painkiller, she determined. His eyes were a little glassier than usual, like they were when he had drunk a little too much. He sighed and leant back with his forearm behind his head. The wounds were still healing and the salve was helping the healing process. The wounds were mostly on the right side of his body.

"There was an explosion. I got hit by the shrapnel."

"Not a word I expected you to know."

"We have learnt lots of words lately," he said bitterly, watching her as she swabbed the wounds one by one. "It was some kind of weapon."

"The man in front of me had his leg shredded," Draco continued. Hermione suspected that he was a little proud of his wounds.

"Anti-personnel mines," Hermione said. "Never used here."

"There used now."

This was news to Hermione. It was fairly extreme measures on behalf of the muggle military.

"Father is furious," he continued. "Never knew the muggles had such a range of weapons. We seem to be stumbling onto new ones every day. We've taken quite a few losses."

Hermione didn't say anything. She certainly was not going to volunteer any more information that might help.

"But we're learning to search and destroy them fairly quickly. Muggle weapons are no match for magic."

I wouldn't bet the house on it, Hermione thought to herself.

"Pretty hard to search for something you can't see," she said.

"They're easy enough to find if you know what to look for. Get me a whiskey."

Hermione checked her immediate reflex to argue and walked over to the decanters. She chided herself for her thoughts, it is what she would have done if it had been Harry or Ron. He wasn't her friend, actually she hated him. She needed to get some distance back. At least he won't be touching her tonight. Whatever potion was keeping him relaxed and pain-free would ensure that he wasn't capable.

She returned to the bed and handed him a large glass of whiskey.

"Would you have been sorry if I died?" he asked, again leaning back on the bed.

Hermione didn't answer, but started to swab the wounds again.

"Answer me," he ordered.

"No," she said without looking up. She could feel tension in the muscles under her fingers. When she finally did look at him, he was turned away looking at something on the other side of the room. He was quiet for a while after that, but Hermione could tell that his eyes were

growing heavy. Blood replenishing potion was healing whatever deficit he suffered, but his body had still incurred a substantial trauma. He would probably sleep for most of tomorrow. His eyes were fluttering closed and Hermione sat as still as she could in case she woke him up again. As soon as he'd fall asleep, Hermione was going to go. She sat for a full five minutes before slowly getting off the bed. She carefully placed a blanket over his exposed skin and made to leave.

"Stay." She heard him say as she was walking towards the door. Hermione narrowed her eyes in annoyance, but returned to the bed as ordered. He made her get in before grabbing his wand and extinguishing the lights.

He was so tired that he was snoring slightly. She had never heard him snore before and it only fed her annoyance. She would be a lot better off if she could return to her own bed. It had been quite a while before she'd slept in it now. Maybe he will grow tired of her soon. Maybe a near-death experience will urge him to actually get a girlfriend and leave her alone.

## Chapter 9

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### Chapter 9

Hermione was woken up in the morning by Mrs. Malfoy and three healers entering the room at the crack of dawn. She slipped out of the room as they were fussing over Draco, checking his wounds. Draco was protesting the intrusion, but was overruled.

The elves were still sad downstairs, some were still crying. Hermione reassured them that Draco was fine and there was practically nothing left of his wounds. Thanks to the healing potions there wouldn't even be any scars. She couldn't understand why they cared, but they seemed to have taken his wounding very hard. Breakfast was pushed forward today to accommodate the healer guests, but neither Lucius nor Draco attended. Mrs. Malfoy being the consummate hostess, entertained the healers and Professor Snape, who had apparently stayed the night. The dark circles under her eyes revealed that she hadn't slept much though.

Hermione left a tray of breakfast food for Draco in his room, but he was fast asleep again. He didn't normally sleep this long, but his body had taken a fair bit of trauma the previous day, so it wasn't unexpected. The curtains were drawn in the room, which was unusual and must have been done by his mother.

At midday, Hermione spotted Neville in the garden and went to grab her coat. It was starting to get pretty chilly outside now and it drizzled slightly. He gave her a big hug when he saw her before she joined him in weeding.

"I heard Draco got hurt," Neville said.

"I'm surprised you've heard," she said.

"If I've heard, then everyone has heard. I think the whole wizarding community is now a lot more concerned about this war with the muggles."

"I never figured losing Draco Malfoy would be devastating to anyone, with the obvious exceptions," Hermione said.

"If he can be injured, being the most coddled out of the pureblood next generation, then anyone can be injured."

"But he is a Death eater, there are risks that come with the territory."

"They are all Death eaters these days," Neville responded.

"So you think this will be a bit of a blow for morale?" Hermione asked.

Neville nodded. They continued weeding. Hermione heard the chimes which meant that one of the family members wanted her, Mrs. Malfoy this time. Hermione wanted to ignore it, but she didn't want to give them another reason to send Neville away. Instead she said goodbye and returned to the house. His coat really was too thin to be working outside all day, she thought. Maybe she could salvage some material from Draco's ruined robes to pad Neville's coat a bit. As winter was fast approaching, it was only going to get colder.

She noted that Mrs. Malfoy had new guests when she entered the house. Three women were paying a call to inquire about Draco. Hermione had to bring them tea, and had to return for more when two more pureblood women turned up. She could tell from the wall that both Lucius and Professor Snape weren't in the house anymore. It was close enough to lunch to assume that the women, at least some of them were staying for lunch.

The tension amongst the women was palpable. They were all very concerned about one of the youths being injured. Hermione wondered if they had been at all concerned about everyone she loved being killed a few years back. They deserved a bit of misery, she thought. None of the women could understand how this had happened.

During lunch the conversation moved towards Draco's single status, with the underlying message being that if he died without an heir, the Malfoy name would be lost. They all seemed fully aware that the Flints, of all people, would inherit the Malfoy fortune if there wasn't a Malfoy heir. None seemed tactless enough to mention that her position as mistress of this house may be in jeopardy as Lucius would probably have to take a new bride to secure another heir, but the knowledge was there in their eyes, Hermione thought.

All in all, it was a lunch filled with uncomfortable silences and fear. Neville was right, they were a lot less certain about this war with the muggles now. They left the lunchroom to take their leave in the main hall in hushed tones.

After lunch, Draco called her to him. He was sitting in one of the chairs in a dressing robe, but the curtains were still drawn. Hermione had his lunch tray, but he wasn't interested as he had just finished his breakfast. Hermione started to clear away the remains of his breakfast.

"So the vultures were here?" he asked.

Hermione assumed he was talking about the women friends of his mother and nodded.

"They were worried."

"I bet they were," he snorted derisively.

"I should take this downstairs."

"Leave it. Help me into the bath."

Hermione went to draw a bath and he followed her into the bathroom. He didn't seem to need much help. She noted that there wasn't a mark on him as he got into the hot bath. He had absolutely no qualms about his nudity, she noted as he lay in the bath watching her. From what she had heard, he had never been all that concerned about his nudity in school either. He had been caught quite a few times in states of semi-undress. And he had never cared. She would have been completely mortified in school if anyone had seen any part of her that she hadn't been willing to show her grandmother's Women's Institute friends. Things were different now, she thought, looking down at her dress that was short enough to border on the obscene.

"Do you want to get in?" Draco said teasingly.

"No," Hermione responded sharply.

He still had that glassy look to his eyes that told her that he was still under the effects of painkillers. He slipped his head under the water and stayed there for a minute. Oddly it

seemed like he wasn't in the room when he was under the water. But the reprieve didn't last long.

When he got out of the bath, he dried off and pulled on the dressing robe again. She guessed he had no plans on leaving his room today. He made her play wizard chess with him afterwards. He won. She wasn't really trying. Never was a game she particularly enjoyed. Ron loved it, on the other hand.

An hour later, he picked a bit from his lunch tray and settled down on the bed.

"You don't read anymore," he stated.

"No."

"Why not?"

Hermione didn't know how to respond. She had just lost interest. She could easily find a way to read, but she just didn't want to.

"I don't have time," she responded.

"You have time right now."

She didn't say anything and didn't make a move to do anything either. She didn't want to read. She didn't want to be reminded of what was, the enthusiasm she had for magic and this world. She didn't feel that anymore.

"I never thought I would see the day when the bookworm extraordinaire would give up her books," he said watching her.

"Never thought I would see the day that I would be sleeping in your bed," she returned to get a wide smile from Draco.

She would rather be cleaning something than sitting here doing nothing. She certainly didn't want to be thinking about the past, or even the present for that matter. There was a comfort in the mind-numbing, repetitive work involved with cleaning. And when you started cleaning something, there was always a clear and concise finish to the task.

"My father thinks the war is turning on us," Draco said.

"I don't think you have a chance," Hermione said with a challenging look.

"We'll see, mudblood."

Dinner was a pretty sombre affair. Professor Snape was back, as were three other visitors. Apparently Voldemort had lost support in France over the last month and their envoy had definitely told them that they should not be counted on for support. Even Bellatrix Lestrange was staying out of his way at the moment, Hermione heard.

Draco hadn't joined them for dinner, instead staying in his room. Hermione brought him his dinner and he ate while she bathed. The gloss in his eyes had now worn off, so the painkillers must have cleared his system. Hermione knew that he would be 'requiring her services' tonight. Although judging from his mother's lunchtime discussions, Mrs. Malfoy would soon be hellbent on making sure he spent his evenings with someone else soon enough.

Draco pulled her down into his lap when she had finished with her bath and returned to the bedroom dressed in a towel.

“Nice and warm,” he said while stroking her thighs. “And smelling lovely. Just how I like you.”

He undid her towel like he was unwrapping a present, exposing her completely. As he leant down to kiss her exposed, dewy skin, Hermione turned her gaze towards the outside, where the wind had picked up. It was too dark to see anything, but she could hear the wind in the trees outside. She hated that he was touching her, and hated it even more as he was taking his time. It was so much harder to suppress the sensations when he was trying to coax them along.

But he had enough of playing with her and led her to the bed, where didn't spend long getting to where he wanted, embedded in her thighs. Tonight was all about pleasure, no messages or games, just revelling in the sensations. On his part, that is. He took his time and savoured each stroke. His breathing told her his climax was coming along and he shuddered as it gripped him.

He fell asleep pretty much straight after, while Hermione searched out her towel to clean up a bit. The fire was dying out and the cold was making her skin prickle. Her appreciation for sleeping next to a warm body was increasing in line with the cooling of the weather, even if it was him.

Once snug in the bed, it didn't take her long to fall asleep either, she had been up since the crack of dawn and the gentle crackling of the dying fire was making her eyes heavy.

Hermione dreamt that night, which was unusual. Even more unusual is that she dreamt of the muggle boy that lived down the road from her, Ricky. She had a monstrous crush on him when she was fourteen. He was young and cocky, and really not her type. He was the kind of guy that the girls went nuts over and that in and of itself was offputting, but he was so very cute. Had the most amazing smile, with lush lips and perfect teeth. When he was a bit older, he rode a motorcycle and always had on this dark leather jacket, which she tried really hard to convince herself was so cliquey. That withstanding, she had dreamt of him on occasion and they were exciting dreams. Dreams that sometimes made the pit of her stomach drop out. And the pit of her stomach was at the moment lost somewhere in the wake of feeling she hadn't had in years, and they were reasserting themselves with a vengeance.

His skin on her backside, back and thighs were glorious, she slowly wiggled around a bit to feel the sensation of it, feeling the heat in her belly grow. Pushing against the thigh that was flush up against hers, even feeling the muscles in it with her hand. As reward, his hand moved up and cupped her breast, which sent shockwaves of sensation through her body. He was kissing her neck now and she couldn't help but let out a shuddering breath. She had never needed intimacy before, but her body absolutely craved it right now.

She gloried in the weight of his body as he pulled her back and slid on top of her. She was kissing the softest lips she had ever felt and the need in them matched her own. A part in the back of her head was warning her against the familiarity of the scent and taste, but she was well beyond caring, she just needed him inside her.



The sensation as he entered her was all-encompassing and it filled her up so completely, catering to the need that had taken over her. Her mind was giving her abstract pictures trying to interpret the sensations from her body. Her body was starting to strongly convulse around him. She didn't even need him to move, being inside her was all she needed, but the gentle thrusts were sending waves of pleasure along her spine and down her legs that were now firmly wrapped around him. She couldn't help her hands from travelling down to his backside and pulling him closer.

As her violent need was finally sated, she slipped back into the dark, comfortable slumberiness that was calling her. He was back behind her now, pulling her close and gently kissing her shoulder. It all felt so lovely. Her mind was trying to tell her something, but she decided that whatever it was she would deal with it later.

## Chapter 10

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### Chapter 10

Hermione woke up just before dawn, with her mind going ‘Ahem’. The knowledge that she had sex with Draco during the night took her breath away for a moment, while she felt all manners of cringe-worthy emotions. He was still asleep next to her, lying on his stomach facing away from her. She wanted to hit him, but knew it would be completely unfair, because she had done it, she had initiated it. She had needed it.

It might have been brought on by the dream, but she knew damned well it was him, no matter what excuse her mind was telling her at the time. She completely and utterly used him. Not that it makes up for each and every time he’s used her. She still couldn’t understand why it had happened. She had been a completely asexual creature for..., well since Ron was alive. She hadn’t felt a twinge of desire for anyone since. She had convinced herself that part of her had died a while back. Maybe it was a one-off. Hopefully. Things would be much more difficult for her if she started craving sex. Giving in and participating in Draco’s use of her every night was beyond considering. She had some pride left after all. It might be buried under her barrier of indifference, but it is the source of the indifference and she needed it to survive.

She wished she could talk to someone about it. Although the only person she talked to was Neville and it would be hard to admit that she accidentally fucked Draco. Another wave of indignified nausea washed over her. Although in school, everyone seemed to have a go with Draco, and a few of them claimed it just happened, which she’d never bought. But last night just kind of happened. It’s not like he was fighting it, he gave her what she needed and she took it. Clear and simple. No use crying over spilt milk. Let’s just keep it simple and make sure it never happens again, she chided herself.

She got out of bed to dress and Draco turned his head towards her. His eyes were opening, he was waking up. She dressed in the baby doll dress to the point of inserting her arm with the bracelet. Draco was now lying on his side watching her. He didn’t say anything, but the blankets had ridden down to reveal most of his lean and muscular torso. Damn his penchant for nudity, she thought. So ridiculously confident. God, she hated him.

She held out her arm to him to remove the bracelet. He reached behind him and got his wand.

“I have to go,” she said, when she was dressed.

He didn’t say anything, but was watching her legs. She didn’t want to know what was going through his mind at that moment. If she had the use of a wand, she would oblivate him, but the bracelet made sure she couldn’t. Instead she turned and left to start the breakfast service.

Draco was in a ridiculously good mood during breakfast, to Hermione’s chagrin. She needed to get back to indifference and she seemed to be getting further away from it every

day. Instead she was filling with hate, which burned and twisted inside her.

After breakfast, she would go find some remote part of the house to clean and work on her mental state. She blamed her lack of indifferent balance for the incident last night. By the end of a couple of hours, the floor was sparkling in whatever kind of room she was in. This room had long since given up its intended purpose and had likely not seen anyone other than her for quite a while. She could probably live in here and no one would ever notice. If she wasn't stuck sleeping in Draco's bed that is.

Only Mrs. Malfoy was in the house for lunch, which meant simply delivering a tray. Mrs. Malfoy completely ignored her intrusion and Hermione escaped as soon as possible. Neville wasn't around that day, so there was no particular purpose for Hermione's walk through the garden in the afternoon. After her walk, she spent an hour sweeping the courtyard between the house and the garden. Mrs. Malfoy had given up telling Hermione which chores to perform each day. Hermione didn't know if that was because she didn't care or she was happy with Hermione choosing her own course through the dusty and mildew ridden house. The unused portions of the house were damp and tended to have mildew developing everywhere.

Before she knew it, she needed to prepare for dinner service. She had managed to quieten her mind somewhat during the day.

Draco was in a foul mood during dinner, and his father had also lost the miniscule outwardly appearance of joviality that he could sometimes display, but had been gone since Draco's injuries. Mrs. Malfoy was doing her best to liven the mood. There were no guests tonight, but she still did her duty.

"Now we really must talk about the future, darling," Mrs. Malfoy said to Draco.

"I'm not getting married, mother," Draco returned sourly.

"Everyone must get married. It is your duty."

"See I thought fighting this infernal war was my duty."

Mrs. Malfoy was seeking support from her husband who was distracted by other thoughts. Mrs. Malfoy reached over to touch his hand which successfully retrieved Lucius from his musings.

"I said, it is time Draco got married."

"Yes," Lucius said, still distracted.

"I'm only 22," Draco stated. "Father was well into his thirties before he got married. I have told you before, I am not going to deal with some clinging imbecile while I have to fight this war."

"What about Pansy?" Mrs. Malfoy plowed on. "You seemed to get on well with her at school."

"She is a lesbian these days, Mother."

"That doesn't really matter, dear," She said to Draco annoyance.

Mrs. Malfoy was also getting annoyed at the distinct lack of backup from her husband. Hermione expected that he was off planning the war in his head. Voldemort would be somewhat lost without Lucius Malfoy, maybe things would have gone better for her side if they had fully realised that earlier. Although he was tasked with the strategy for this war, she suspected it was not a war he had encouraged. And the sum of the things she heard, things weren't going well. Hermione wondered why he wasn't pushing hard for an heir.

When dinner was finished, Draco went at the first available opportunity. Lucius followed, off to his study, leaving Mrs. Malfoy to her own devices.

Hermione had to report for the bath after clearing up, but she took her time. She didn't want to deal with Draco tonight. Not only was there last night, but he was also in a foul mood. Maybe that was good. All the same, she didn't want to go, but she did.

He was drinking heavily and followed her into the bathroom to help her undress.

"I can't believe my mother. She doesn't care a whit about my happiness. It's all duty with her."

"Your father doesn't seem so concerned."

"Voldemort tends to play fast and loose with the men that are 'well-established'," Draco said, sucking on a cigarette.

Hermione could understand Lucius' lack of enthusiasm for getting his son married at this particular point, which was an immense disappointment to Hermione with regards to her immediate situation.

"Your mother doesn't seem to be aware of this fact," she said while getting into the bath.

"We don't trouble her with any of the things that go on around the Dark Lord. It is hard enough to keep her nerves in check as it is. A bit harder now."

Hermione tried the trick that she learned from Draco and sank under the water. She stayed there as long as she could, enjoying the silence. When she emerged, Draco was gone. Excellent trick.

Eventually she couldn't stay in the bath any longer and got out. He was sitting behind his desk and got up as she came out of the bathroom. He came over to her and pulled her to him by pulling her towel. He forced a deep kiss on her while taking hold of her wet hair at the back of her neck. Hermione was still holding the towel around her chest, doing her best to be still and unreactive. After the kiss ended, he was leaning his forehead on hers and smiled to himself.

"Back to that are we?" he stated more than asked.

Hermione didn't respond and felt uncomfortable under his gaze.

"See, last night..."

"Was an anomaly," she cut him off. "It meant nothing. Just one of those things."

He was silent for a second.

“It could be more,” he said slowly. “I could be very good to you. I can provide you with anything you need. Protect you from what’s going on out there. Give you anything you want. Clothes, jewellery.”

“I’m only interested in the lack of jewellery,” Hermione said sharply, holding up the iron bracelet on her wrist.

He stared at the bracelet for a second. He seemed to be formulating what to say.

“We both know what happened the last time that bracelet came off,” he said after a while.

Hermione’s anger flashed up and she pushed him away. He had the audacity to propose some kind of arrangement with her, that she be his mistress or something along the lines of Stina that pined away all day until her paramour returned to throw her whatever crumbs he would spare her. He didn’t seriously think she would agree to this.

“My friends are dead,” Hermione said, shaking with anger. “Everyone I loved is dead. You and your people are responsible for that. And you think in a million years that I would accept you.”

She wasn’t exactly sure what she was saying, it was just spewing out.

“I don’t want to be near you,” she spat. “I hate you. I don’t want to sleep in your bed. I don’t want you to touch me. The only reason I don’t fight is because I don’t care enough about you to take the fucking beating for refusing.”

She could tell that her words stung. He looked hurt, but the hurt look was giving away to anger. She was in trouble now, she thought. She had gone too far and he was going to punish her now, her mind flashed. She didn’t care, she told herself. It was only pain, she had been here before.

He forcefully wrapped his hands around her throat and pushed her back onto the bed. Climbing on top of her and squeezing. Hermione couldn’t help but start to cry and the tears were flowing quick and heavy.

Draco immediately loosened his grip on her throat.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered and hugged her to him. “I didn’t mean to.”

“I’ll never hurt you.” He wiped the tears from her cheek before leaning in to kiss her. He took advantage of Hermione’s gasp for breath and dove his tongue deep into her mouth. It could only be described as a passionate kiss in a lost your marbles kind of way. He was pulling her body closer towards him and then proceeded to kiss her neck and collarbone, travelling down to her breasts.

“I’ll make you love me,” he mumbled.

Hermione’s shock was quieting her emotions and she recognised that under the surface, he was a lot less stable than she had anticipated. This was not good. During her musings on his mental state, he had unzipped and was now entering her. He needed this, she realised. Needed her.

This was not good.

## Chapter 11

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### Chapter 11

The next few days passed like any typical day. There wasn't any discussion about what happened. It seemed that both decided that delving into the others' true emotion or intention was not helping either of them. Hermione tried not to think about it or the implications. Things immediately returned to the old routine. Draco would return late in the afternoon from wherever he went during the days. His bath, dinner, her bath, sex and sleep. It was a routine she could live with and she had the distinct feeling that she was altogether better off not challenging it.

Then one day, Draco returned earlier than usual, which messed Hermione's schedule up a bit. He was waiting for her when she got to his room. Waiting for her usually made him cranky but he was in a good mood today, which made her more concerned than if he was cranky. Things had either gone really well out there, or things were going to go really well for him in here.

Hermione went to clear his cloak from the floor to return it to the hanger. He watched her from the seat where he was nursing a whiskey and having a smoke. She hated the smoke, it stuck in her nostrils, but luckily the room was big enough to disburse it after a while. Hermione found things to do while he sat and watched. The other option was to stand and stare back, which would just invite whatever it was he was thinking of.

She had completely dismissed him saying he wanted her love as just something Deatheaters say after they try to strangle their slaves. Lucius has probably said it to Stina too on the odd occasion, she thought bitterly. Not dismissing it was something much worse to think about, but being the analytical person she was she couldn't keep the thoughts out. He had said something about wanting her back in school. There could be the odd chance that whatever this was ran a lot deeper than she had ever realised. Surely not, she thought. She could fully see how he might have had the odd fantasy about her. She was after all the part of the trio that he hated that he could actually..., such hatred was bound to develop a sexual component in hormonal teenagers. He still wasn't that far away from being a hormonal teenager; it had only officially been two years since he had been a teenager.

"Run me a bath," he ordered, waking Hermione from her own distracted musings. She complied and he followed her into the bathroom. "I have decided that one should make the best use of having a slave."

Hermione wanted to cringe from whatever was coming out of his twisted little mind. Previously all of his determinations of her job as a slave were sexual in nature. This would undoubtedly be something of that nature. Probably involving the bath.

"I want you to undress me and then you will get the privilege to wash me," he said, with the familiar little smirk.

Oh joy, Hermione thought to herself. Actually not too bad in terms of what she was expecting. Relatively tame really. She knew he liked being fussed over when in the bath. He liked having his feet massaged on occasion, while he chatted away about what was on his mind. What a baby, she thought.

She went to unbutton his white shirt and it felt really odd. She had never undressed anyone before. With Ron it had always been a hurried fumbling off with clothes, often in conjunction with kissing, tickling and copious amounts of laughing. Sex with Ron had been fun, sweet and tender. She didn't want to think of Ron when she was unwrapping Draco Malfoy like an unwanted present.

When she got to the end of the row of buttons she had to tug the shirt out of his pants. She had to undo the cufflinks before she could get the shirt off him. Only he would wear cufflinks, she thought as she fiddled with the tiny clasps. Silver with dragons carved into the onyx stones. With the cufflinks gone, the shirt came off easily when she pushed it past his shoulders. Next she decided to tackle the black boots and she had to get down on her knees to put enough pressure on the heel and toe to allow him to step out.

This left the undershirt and the pants. She didn't want to take off either. This was just ridiculous she thought. How could he be such a baby to want someone to undress him, she asked herself. She grabbed the soft cotton undershirt and tugged it out of the black pants. It was tight enough to require that her knuckles skimmed his skin all the way up his sides before it came over his head and shoulder. That left the pants, with the tidy black leather belt, which probably cost more than her entire wardrobe, when she had one that was. She knew he was watching her and she hated it. The pin came out easily, but the belt sat tightly on his hips. She had to place a hand on his hip to get enough leverage to pull it out.

Then the button of his pants that sat right on top of the little trail of hairs that went from his bellybutton down. It was actually hard to undo a button from that angle, she had to get her fingers in behind it, pressed up against the warm skin. His skin should be cold, she thought, it was more fitting if it was cold. Although she knew well enough by now that he wasn't, his body heat kept her warm at night.

Undoing the zipper was uncomfortable and she could tell that this was having some effect on him. She didn't want to pull down his pants, but she did it. She grabbed the cloth at his sides and gently slid the material down, making sure she got all material so she didn't have to repeat this with his boxers. She wanted to yank it down in protest, but she knew that he might be in a state where that could hurt. Physically hurting him would be much worse for her in the end. The pants were tight and she had to force the material over his thighs, knees and calves.

When he was starkers, he stepped into the steamy bath and lay down. Hermione let out the breath she had been holding. She didn't feel utterly humiliated, but neither was she detached the same way she was before. She was annoyed and angry. She picked up a washcloth and crouched down to start washing him.

"Oh no," he said. "You're going to have to get in."

"You're joking," she said glaring at him.

"I'm afraid I'm not." He smirked again. "Get undressed, you wouldn't want to ruin that pretty dress."

He was punishing her, she decided. Strangling wasn't to his taste, but he was aiming to humiliate her as much as humanly possible. She steeled herself against feeling humiliated, in fact she refused. None of this was her doing and she didn't have a choice. Why should she feel humiliated because something he was doing. She would not take responsibility for his actions.

She gritted her teeth and started to undress. He grabbed his wand and undid the bracelet, leaving it on the side of the bathtub. Her arm felt oddly light without its weight. She knew she didn't have a chance against him if she decided to fight. Even without a bracelet, he was much stronger and he had a wand which he kept well out of her reach.

She started washing her feet and decided that she would treat this as any other cleaning duty she performed. Thankfully the tub was much larger than the typical muggle tub so she didn't have to sit on him as she moved up his body. She avoided his private area, but she could tell that he was enjoying her ministrations. She rubbed the washcloth over his entire body, she even shampooed and conditioned his hair. He practically moaned when she massaged the lotion into his scalp.

"You are such a baby," she said and got a broad smile in return.

Finally she worked her way down his arms and finishing with washing his fingers. That left only one area, but he stopped her before she moved there and took the cloth off her. He quickly washed his privates and got out of the tub, leaving Hermione sitting there.

"Thanks, sweetheart, that was great," he said as he wrapped a towel around his waist. He grabbed the wand and walked out.

Now Hermione was fighting hard to keep the humiliation out. There was no reason she should feel that, she told herself over and over again as she got out and dried off. He came back fully dressed and replaced the bracelet.

"It's time for dinner. You're going to be late," he said stoically.

Hermione ran downstairs to prepare for the dinner service, damning him for making her late. She hated being late, her entire existence was about being efficient, effective and utterly detached. An automaton if you will.

She made it just in time for carrying out the soup course. There were four guests tonight including Professor Snape and Bellatrix Lestrange, so there would be little food extra for the creatures down below, including her. They were in a good mood, something had obviously gone well. Even Lucius was in a good mood and the alcohol was flowing.

"You should have seen them scurrying, Cissa," Bellatrix said, laughing. "Ran like rats, they did."

Mrs. Malfoy was obviously enjoying the good mood. Draco was as well.

"Now they know that nowhere is safe," one of the other guests said.

Hermione did her best to play the automaton she had decided to be so long ago. Mostly she was ignored, but one of the Death eaters grabbed her behind while filling up his glass.

"Such a pretty mudblood," he said to the table, "You're lucky to have her."



Mrs. Malfoy was embarrassed by the statement and Draco was less than amused.

"Try to keep your crudeness in the gutter where it belongs," Bellatrix warned.

With that, they moved on to celebrate whatever it was they were all so happy about and forgot about her.

When dinner finished, they got up and left. Hermione started to clean up when the Death eater who had manhandled her before returned.

"Such a pretty little thing," he said leaning on a chair.

"I have to clear the table please."

"Such things can wait," he smiled and started towards her.

On no, Hermione thought. She knew what was coming and there wasn't much she could do about it. Detached, detached, detached, she repeated to herself like a mantra. He roughly grabbed her arm and shoved her up against the wall. Hermione wanted to throw up. She could smell the alcohol on his breath, which probably stunk even without the alcohol. He grabbed at her breast.

"So comely."

"Like fuck," she heard Draco say from the door. "You don't get to touch her."

The man stopped, but kept his hand on her breast.

"That is a bit ungenerous of you," the man said. "Keeping a ripe little mudblood like this all to yourself."

"She's mine," Draco warned.

"You need to learn to share, boy," the man stated with steel in his voice before returning his attention to Hermione.

A thud made the man drop to the floor. Draco had hit him with a heavy crystal vase, which now had blood on its edge.

"I said, you don't get to touch her," Draco yelled. He proceeded to kick the man hard and continued to do so.

"You fuck," Draco screamed while continuing to kick the man with enough force to make a sound as the man's body connected with the wall.

He wasn't stopping. And the man must be getting more injured with each kick.

"Draco, stop," Hermione yelled. She shouldn't care, but she didn't like seeing the violence even if it was purebloods killing each other.

He still wouldn't stop, so Hermione resorted to pulling his arm as hard as she could.

The noise had attracted both Lucius and Professor Snape who both rushed in and pulled Draco away from the unconscious body of the disgusting man.

"What is going on here?" Lucius asked while surveying the scene. He looked from his son back to Hermione. "Have you lost your mind?" he asked Draco.

“Nobody touches her,” Draco screamed, still in a fit of rage.

“Take him upstairs,” Lucius ordered Professor Snape.

Hermione didn’t know what to do. Whether she should go, stay and help the man or stay and clear the table.

“Go,” he said and Hermione shot through the door leading downstairs.

She didn’t know what to do downstairs either, she hands were shaking with adrenalin. But her dilemma didn’t last long because Draco was calling for her.

When she got to Draco’s room, he was sitting in one of the large chairs while Professor Snape sat on the couch.

“Drink,” Draco ordered and Hermione went to the decanter holding his whiskey.

“I think you’ve had enough tonight,” Professor Snape warned.

Hermione returned with the drink and gave it to Draco outstretch hand. Hermione went to sit on the chair over by the wall.

Lucius walked into the room.

“What is wrong with you?” Lucius accused Draco.

“She is mine. Nobody touches her,” Draco said.

Lucius considered him for a while.

“She is what she is, son, you cannot go around attacking people who treat her as such,” Lucius said.

“Nobody touches her,” Draco warned again.

Lucius and Professor Snape exchanged looks.

“We will deal with this tomorrow,” Lucius finally said. “Right now I have to deal with the mess you’ve caused. Do not leave this room again tonight.”

After Lucius and Professor Snape had gone, there was complete silence in the room. After a few minutes, Draco got up and waved for her to come as he walked towards the bed. He pulled Hermione down in front of him and leaned into her back with his arm around her waist. They stayed there for a long time and Hermione could tell that he wasn’t sleeping. Sometimes she could feel his lips on the skin at the back of her neck. It wasn’t kisses, but the slightest of touches.

## Chapter 12

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### Chapter 12

Hermione woke up fully dressed, she must have finally fallen asleep. Draco was still sleeping. She slipped out from under the heavy blanket which he must have placed on them. The air was cold and her bare legs shivered slightly. He looked peaceful when sleeping, with his blond hair falling into his eyes. He was still dressed as well.

She remembered the events from the night before and her stomach constricted. Somehow this was going to be made to be her fault, she just knew it. Maybe they would even take Draco out of the little scene completely and say she did it. The man was hit from behind so he would never be able to refute it. This could be very, very bad for her. She may be able to gauge the mood at breakfast. Somehow she will be punished for this, how and how severely was yet to be seen. She wasn't sure what Draco would do however. If it had been back in school, he would have enjoyed any punishment being metered out her way, especially if he got to meter it out. He had a particularly fruitful time in that respect on the Inquisitorial Squad. He managed to give her detention quite a few times for the most ridiculous reasons. But this was different, this could be very serious.

She would face it, whatever was coming. She always did and she knew that she could be punished anytime for no reason at all. It wasn't the first time she had been made a scapegoat. She didn't know how she felt about him defending her. She didn't trust his motives. In the end his motives always came down to his own gains. Maybe it would have been better for all if he hadn't interfered. It would have meant some really unpleasant moments for her, but it would have been over after a few minutes.

She left before he woke. She busied herself with the preparations for breakfast but the tension sat like a knot in her stomach.

Breakfast was a quiet affair. The celebratory mood from the night before was gone and she was the reason why, or rather Draco, but she was the mudblood in the room at the time.

After breakfast, Lucius and Draco left the house, and Hermione went to clean some forgotten corner of the house. Neville would be there in the afternoon and Hermione was dying to see a friendly face. Mrs. Malfoy's chime came shortly after eleven. Hermione knew this was going to be something about last night. At least it was Mrs. Malfoy and not Mr. Malfoy, unless she was going to warn her that he would be 'speaking' to her tonight.

"There you are," Mrs. Malfoy said sternly. "We have decided that it might be best to place you elsewhere. Pack your things."

With that she was waved out of the room and Hermione went to pack. She was being placed in another house. Her head was spinning with the implications. First of all, she wasn't going to die today, which was her unvoiced but under-riding concern. She would be free of Draco, but she would lose Neville. Probably back to feeling no emotions at all. Unless they

weren't placing her with another family, maybe it would be something much worse. She would deal with whatever it was the only way she knew how.

She packed her meagre belongings in the tattered suitcase. She wished she could put on one of the formless serving dresses, but she couldn't get the baby doll dress off due to the bracelet. She wasn't going to ask Mrs. Malfoy to help her undress. She would have to go as she was.

Half an hour later, Hermione was waiting in the kitchen, wearing her sturdy shoes. She said goodbye to the elves and to Stina, who gave her a brief nod. Neither friendly or unfriendly, just acknowledgement of Hermione's fate. Hermione couldn't help but be nervous. She wasn't nervous the last time she was moved, but her time here had changed her. Specifically her time with Draco, but that was over now.

She heard the chime calling her upstairs to the foyer where Professor Snape was waiting for her.

"The Professor will take you," Mrs. Malfoy said before turning away, not bothering to look at her.

"Come," he said and reached out for her elbow.

He side along apparated her to a small house. The room they were in was dark and dusty. It was full of books on every wall. The house was completely quiet. She could hear the ticking of a clock and some cars outside. There were cars.

"I will show you to your room," he said and walked towards the stairs. She followed him. This place was small but there was plenty of cleaning to keep her busy.

As Professor Snape walked along the second floor, Hermione realised that this was probably his house. Otherwise he would not be showing her to her room. She was going to serve Professor Snape.

"I don't have servants' quarters, so you will have to stay in here," he said while looking down his nose at her. "It has been unoccupied for some time, but I am sure you know how to make it usable."

Hermione sat her suitcase down on the bed and was met by a plume of dust.

"There is an elf in the kitchen by the name of Clara. She can show you where everything is," he said before leaving the room and from what she would tell the house.

The room she was in had a window that looked down on a muggle street. She was in a muggle neighbourhood. At Professor Snape's house. She would clean this little house and help with serving him meal whenever he was here. In return she would stay here in what was obviously a second bedroom that had at one point been occupied by a woman. Obviously a long time ago. One of the dressers had a radio that looked like it was from the fifties. She wondered if it still worked. If he needed other services, she would comply. Somehow she didn't think he would want that, but you never knew with men.

Hermione found the elf, who was beyond ecstatic to have some company. Hermione was shown the cleaning cupboard which was sparse to say the least. She spent the next few hours, after Clara tried her best to ply her with food, cleaning her room. She took the dusty duvet out

into the minuscule garden, which wasn't more than a patch of dirt with some dead twigs sticking out of the ground. It took a good half hour of hitting to get the duvet free of dust.

Another three hours to scrub the surfaces in her room. The wardrobe still had women's robes in them from the previous occupant, an older woman. Maybe the Professor's mother.

All in all, Hermione was pleased. This would be a quiet life. Judging from the books downstairs, the Professor spent most of his time reading when he was at home. She could maybe even bring the little plot of dirt back to life if he didn't object. From the looks of it, there were never any visitors and judging from past behaviour, her new master would probably never speak to her.

When it started getting dark, she went downstairs to see if Clara needed any help. Clara was really happy about having some help, not that she really needed it when it came to cooking, which was Clara's one and only duty. Clara chatted incessantly. Before dinner was ready, Hermione knew all there was to know about Clara. She had been born here and had lived here ever since. Her mother served the Bellence family, before they were Snapes. Professor Snape was related to the Black, the Lestranges and the Notts. All good pureblood families, before the unfortunately incident of Mr. Snape. Clara obviously didn't like the late Mr. Snape.

Hermione couldn't hear it, but Clara could. Whatever small noise Professor Snape made that signified that he was home.

Hermione brought in the meal on a tray to Professor Snape's study, where he always took his meals.

"Haven't you something more appropriate to wear, Miss Granger?" he asked, annoyed by her presence.

"I do, but I cannot get this dress off without help," she confessed.

She wasn't sure but she thought she saw him roll his eyes before bring out his wand and casting some silent charm on her sleeve.

When she was back in the kitchen, she checked the sleeve and the material stretched every time she pulled it.

An hour later, she went back to the study to collect the empty tray. Professor Snape had moved to a chair which seemed to be his typical evening location. He was reading a book and ignored her presence completely.

She grabbed the tray and brought it back to the kitchen, before going back for the earthenware jug of elderflower wine. Once she had returned to the kitchen she heard a crash from inside the house. She turned to stare at the door and listened to angry voices. She couldn't make out what was going on, but the kitchen door burst open and Draco grabbed her arm. He pulled her along and yanked her around while he was looking for something. He settled on going for the door that led to the little garden and practically dragged Hermione as she stumbled on something. She could hear Professor Snape behind her, telling Draco to be reasonable.

Before she knew it, she was being apparated. She landed back in Draco's room. Hermione lost her balance and nausea washed over. Being unprepared for apparating made it much more

disorientating she decided. She was still holding onto Professor Snape's elderflower wine.

"I told you, you're not going anywhere," he said and pulled her up from where she had fallen on the floor. He took out his wand and performed a locking spell on his door. He grabbed her head and laughed. His eyes were glittering and he looked like he was very pleased with what he had achieved.

There was a banging on the door, and she could hear Mrs. Malfoy calling for Draco.

"Not now, Mother. I'm busy."

He kissed her roughly and walked her back to his bed while grabbing the jug of wine and throwing it in the corner where it broke.

"You belong to me. I told you that," he said hoarsely.

Hermione fell back in the bed and Draco wasted no time claiming what he wanted. Somehow he had managed to unzip and was lifting her thigh up to gain better access to her core. His breathing was ragged and uncontrolled even before he entered her. He kept kissing her while he sunk into her again and again. She could feel his teeth on her chin as he came. He wasn't biting but she knew that he liked to.

He stayed inside her for a long time afterwards. His weight was bearing down on her while he struggled to get his breathing under control. Finally he settled down with his head on her chest.

Hermione guessed she wasn't going anywhere after all.

## Chapter 13

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### Chapter 13

Hermione woke up to find Draco watching her. She was naked after Draco had another go at her later in the night.

“What time is it?” she asked.

Draco shrugged and grabbed his wand. He pointed towards the fireplace and started a fire. Her dress was laying some ways away from the bed, which meant a naked dash to retrieve it in the chilly air.

As she tried to get up, he pulled her back.

“Stay,” he said.

“I have to...” she started.

“I’ll tell you what you have to do. And right now I want you to stay,” he said as he nuzzled up against her back. The both fell asleep again.

They must have slept for another hour, before being awoken by a scratch on the window. An owl was trying to get in. Draco got up and put on a black velvet dressing robe. He retrieved the letter and read it while walking over to his desk.

Hermione’s stomach was growling as she hadn’t eaten since lunchtime at Professor Snape’s house. Fortunately for her, Draco seemed to be hungry too and ordered one of the house elves to bring breakfast to the room. It appeared in less than five minutes. He grabbed a piece of toast then levitated the tray over to her on the bed.

Hermione ate as much as her stomach would take, which wasn’t all that much these days.

“Eat up,” he said, when she wasn’t hungry anymore. “I don’t like it when you’re too skinny.”

She tried to eat some more, but it was now going down like tar. She hated him for ordering her to eat. Usually it’s too little, now too much, why can’t these people ever just do it right, she thought angrily to herself.

After she finished, she felt a bit queasy. She watched him as he finished the letter and grabbed some blank parchment. She had nothing else to do but to watch. She wondered why he kept her in the room. Were his parents going to send her back to Professor Snape or even somewhere else where Draco couldn’t figure out where she was. Was she going to have to stay in here now? A prisoner now?

Draco spent an hour writing a number of letters. After that, he spent close to an hour in the bathroom, having a shower and doing his morning rituals. Hermione snuggled back into the bed. There was nothing else she could do. It couldn’t quite get warm enough without him.

When Draco got out, still wearing the dressing robe, he headed for his whiskey decanters and poured himself a drink. His wet hair was slicked back and it had a bit more of a yellow tone when it was wet, Hermione noted.

“Want one?” he asked.

Hermione shook her head. She had never been partial to it, and especially not before lunchtime.

As he sat down on his chair to sip the whiskey and light up a cigarette, Mrs. Malfoy was knocking on the door again. Draco stayed put and just smoked until his mother went away again.

After a while, he ordered a lunch tray from the elves and two steaming plates appeared. Hermione was still overfull from breakfast and the thought of more food was unappealing. But Draco wanted her to eat, so she tried. After yet more food, Hermione’s eyes grew heavy again, even though she had slept in. She dozed off for a while.

When she woke up, Draco was sitting at his desk again, reading a newspaper.

“Such a sleepyhead, aren’t you?” he said. “You know, I remember a time when you were in the Daily Prophet just about every day.”

Hermione didn’t say anything but just stared at him.

“Plain but ambitious girl they called you once, I recall,” he said, and continued when he still didn’t get a response. “What were your intentions, when you grew up?”

“Besides being a sex slave to purebloods?” she asked sarcastically. She didn’t want to talk, but he was still waiting for an answer. She refused to answer.

“Were you going to marry the Weasel?”

Hermione could feel the anger bubbling under the surface. “Don’t talk about him.” she warned.

“Still so feisty,” he said and smiled. “You should read something. You might be here a while.”

Hermione didn’t make a move. She didn’t want to read. It was too much of a reminder of who she used to be and all that she had lost. She hated how he tried to talk about the past.

He noted that she didn’t move.

“I know you like to read,” he said walking over to the bookcases and grabbing a book. “You spent just about every spare minute you had in the library. Why aren’t you reading?”

“I don’t want to.”

“I can always find something else for you to do if you wish,” he said and handed her the book.

He knew full well that whatever pride she had left made her comply, because she would never invite what else he was thinking of, as they both knew exactly what he was referring to.



The book was on magical remedies for illnesses. Hermione grabbed the book and roughly shoved a pillow under her chest so she could lie on her stomach and read the damned book.

“Out loud,” he ordered before lying down on the bed next to her.

Hermione started to read and he seemed to listen for a while. Then he pulled the duvet down to reveal her naked form. He started to kiss her skin and took time to kiss her all over while she read. She could hear that he was starting to get excited through his breathing. She kept on reading, which seemed to be what he wanted, but couldn't stop because he had set that up as an invite for whatever he was going to do to her anyway. She was not going to invite it. Ever.

He arranged her to get better access and then had sex with her while she read. He took his time and didn't make a sound throughout. Afterwards she kept reading until he was well asleep. She got up and dressed. Thanks to Professor Snape, she didn't need Draco's help to dress anymore. The room was warm now and Draco was sleeping half covered in the bed. She watched him for a little while. There weren't any signs of his injuries now. His chest was smooth and white like porcelain. He looked so peaceful when he slept. Beautiful even. She wondered about the effect that his personality had on him as he seemed so different when he was awake. The calculating eyes, cold sneer. His aggressive nature.

She wondered if she had just been a party to the acting out of a fantasy. Although she couldn't see how her reading a book would be erotic for anyone. No one she knew had found it even mildly noteworthy. Slytherins were weird, she decided.

She walked over to the window and smiled when she saw Neville in the garden. She didn't want to knock in case she woke up the sleeping dragon, but she waved like crazy until Neville saw that she was there. She tried to sign that she couldn't come out, but waved and smiled repeatedly. She blew a kiss before leaving the window. Draco was not likely to sleep long.

He woke with such a start, it made Hermione jump in the chair she was in. Then she chided herself for being ridiculous.

He got up and put on his dressing robe again. He walked towards the whiskey decanters again. After he poured himself a drink and lit up another cigarette, he sat down.

“Are you not going to leave the room today?” Hermione asked.

“No.”

“I didn't know Deatheaters had days off,” Hermione said but was met with silence.

“Blaize's wife is with child,” he said after a while.

“Oh.” Was all Hermione could say.

“He is over the moon. Never figured him for being domesticated, but it is increasingly looking that way.”

“Marriage suits a lot of men,” Hermione said not minding the conversation out of sheer boredom. “Are you thinking along those lines?”

“Mother would be ecstatic, but no, I have no inclination towards wedded bliss,” he said and took a drag on the noxious cigarette.

“You seem to like having someone here waiting for you,” Hermione stated.

“I like having you here.”

“Because I don’t argue with you and do everything you say?” Hermione asked with a heavy lilt of resentment.

“You’d have to do that even if you were my wife.”

“Oh yes,” Hermione huffed, “Pureblood gender roles, I forgot.”

“And that wouldn’t have been you? The Weasel might have been a blood traitor, but he was still a pureblood and that comes with certain expectations.”

Hermione knew it was true and it had been something that had weighed heavy on her mind at the time.

“Please don’t speak about him,” Hermione asked quietly.

Draco watched the remainder of his drink. “What would I need a wife for when I have you? I can do anything I want with you and if you piss me off, I never have to see you again.”

Everything he said was accurate, but it still prickled a little to be so utterly disposable. Although she was even more annoyed that anything he said had any effect on her. She really had to get herself under control.

“I’m going to go see Blaize,” he said and walked away to dress.

He walked out the door and closed it behind him. She could hear him mutter the spell that locked the door.

He was gone for two hours, which Hermione spent watching the garden from the window. Neville was long gone and the drizzle made the gray landscape shiny and dark. The fire Draco started in the morning was still going, keeping the room nicely warm. She still wished she could be outside, even if it was bitterly cold.

Draco was in a good mood when he returned, but Hermione didn’t really notice or care.

“It’s time for my bath, don’t you think?”

Hermione didn’t respond. It was a statement rather than a question. She obediently followed him into the bathroom to run the bath. She started to undress him.

“Where has my little mudblood gone?” he asked watching her face. “What have you been doing while I was gone?”

“Looking out the window,” Hermione stated.

“Is that right?” Draco said. “I don’t like it when you look out of the window. It seems to do things to you. No more looking out the window. You remember what I had to do to snap you out of those funny moods, don’t you.”

“Yes,” Hermione said.

“I’m going to have to fuck you until you scream my name,” he leaned in and whispered.

Hermione felt the anger boil up again, breaking through her aloof state. If looks could kill, he'd be dead.

"Although it is getting much easier to snap you out of them," he said with a smirk.

Hermione got her dress off and scrubbed him from head to toe in the bath. Every curve, muscle, sinew and bone covered by the creamy skin. It really did feel like silk in the water. Again he did his own private area, which Hermione was only too happy about.

He told her to wash her hair as he got out. His expensive shampoos did have something in them that tamed her hair somewhat.

When she got out, she dried off and started to dress.

"Don't bother," she heard from the bedroom. "It's only coming off again. I'm really not happy about that sleeve. It is ruining my fun."

There were two dinner trays waiting for them when she walked out in her towel. She couldn't remember a time when she had eaten so much in one day. After they had eaten, Draco read some more papers on his desk. He didn't even look up as his mother was knocking on the door again. She tried the door handle, but whatever charm he had put on it was holding.

He made her wait for him in bed while he dealt with whatever he was doing. He wrote another letter and sent it by owl from the window before coming to the bed and letting the dressing robe drop. He stood completely nude by the bed. He liked being watched, Hermione decided.

"My absolute favourite part of the day," he said while climbing into bed.

And my least, Hermione thought to herself.

"Although today has been fairly good all round. Maybe even perfect."

He leant in to kiss her and she took it with stoic resignation. She would even comply when he ordered her mouth open to let him explore at his leisure. She was so used to his taste now, she couldn't recall any other. But instead of entering her as he normally would, he trailed kisses down her chest and towards one of her nipples. The sensation as he took it in his mouth was undeniable, even with all her effort of trying to suppress it. It got even worse when he trailed kisses lower down her abdomen towards her core.

She tried to protect herself by keeping her thigh squeezed over her most sensitive parts, but he wouldn't accept it and nudged her thigh away. She suppressed a gasped as he took her most sensitive little nub in his mouth. Oh you evil bastard, she thought. The wet heat of his mouth and tongue sent shooting sensations through out her body. She felt herself being called towards the sensation by a beautiful and ancient lullaby. Her body was begging her to chase it, but she refused. She wouldn't. He couldn't make her without her help, she realised. He couldn't take it further. It just wasn't enough if she fought it and she did with everything she had.

But she couldn't help the moisture building up inside her and it made Draco groan as entered her sliding in to the hilt. The sensation and the beckoning call reasserted itself with every stroke, but she refused to let it take her where it wanted to. Where he wanted to.

Luckily Draco didn't last long. He collapsed onto of her and rolled off after catching his breath. He was obviously pleased.

"Coming along nicely, Granger," he said with that infuriating smirk that made her want to hit him.

He dragged her back towards him as he settled down on his side. She could feel his skin along her back, backside and legs. Her core had a dull ache of unsatisfaction, which didn't seem to want to subside.

"Sweet dreams, Granger," he said once he turned off the lights. She knew that smirk was still in place. "I really hope you do."

Hermione was fuming. He was seducing her, she realised. All of it. The undressing, bathing. Getting her to touch him all the time. The constant nakedness. Now this. He was winding her up like a coil. Well she wasn't going to break. Maybe he knew that. He had also been privy to what tension did to her in the middle of the night and she wasn't so sure she could control that by steely determination. She also didn't if she could cope if this barrage of sensuality kept up. Damn him, damn it.

## Chapter 14

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### Chapter 14

Draco didn't make a move to leave the room the next morning either. It started pretty much the same as the last one. He read the paper and some letters at his desk while she ate breakfast in the bed.

Around mid-morning, with a fizz, Lucius broke whatever charm Draco had placed on the room and entered the room. He noted Hermione sitting in the bed, while she tucked the duvet in a bit tighter around her naked body. She wasn't embarrassed, but neither was she detached as she was a while ago when situations like this were just one insignificant moment after the last insignificant moment.

"You are neglecting your duties," he stated to Draco, who was sitting back in his desk chair. Not happy about the intrusion.

"I don't care about pointless fucking duties."

Lucius surveyed the room again, his eyes yet again settling on Hermione in the bed. Hermione knew that this was a good time to find something interesting on the floorboards to watch intently.

"The Dark Lord cares deeply about your duties," Lucius said coldly. "He is starting to notice your absence."

Draco didn't say anything.

"He will ensure that you are not neglectful if you do not take care," Lucius continued. "What I am saying is that if you wish to keep her, you need to do what is required of you or he will take her."

Hermione felt a chill running up her spine. She couldn't imagine anything worse than being taken away by Lord Voldemort. It would assuredly end in pain and death for her. She had heard the purebloods talking about his form of entertainment with persons deemed slave-class.

"Now get dressed. We are leaving," Lucius said before turning and walking out.

Draco swore and walked over towards his wardrobe. He dressed and left without saying a word.

When he'd gone, Hermione dressed as well. She still couldn't leave the room, so she stayed seated in one of the chairs. Thankful for the moment that she was not being tortured to death, because she had the feeling that it was just a matter of time.

A lunch tray was delivered a while later. The food was steaming hot and delicious. She had taken care not to eat too much at breakfast in case she would have to keep eating all day. After lunch she stared out the window for a while. She didn't care what he said, but she would have to make an effort to be less detached afterwards, otherwise he would know.

Mrs. Malfoy entered the room a short time later.

"Come," she said and turned to leave.

Hermione followed, realising that they were probably sending her away again. Probably somewhere far away. Hermione wondered whether she should ask them to remove her bracelet. She would just slip away and he would never find her.

When she got downstairs, Professor Snape was waiting and they all continued downstairs towards the kitchen, which was odd.

"Sit," he told her as they reached the ancient wooden table. He pulled out a wrapped syringe and a muggle medicine bottle.

"Is that it?" Mrs. Malfoy asked. Snape nodded.

Hermione was confused. She quickly searched for a label on the bottle.

Medroxyprogesterone acetate, it read. Progesterone. That must be some kind of contraceptive. They were going to inject her with a contraceptive. A muggle contraceptive. Why in the world? She had been charmed up to the eyeballs in contraceptive spells over the last three years.

Professor Snape and Mrs. Malfoy stared at the objects for a bit before Snape broke the paper/plastic wrapper around the syringe.

"How do you get the potion in?" Mrs. Malfoy asked.

Professor Snape pulled the lever back and placed the syringe on the table. Hermione watched the needle. Oh god, she thought, they were going to give her an infection.

"It said 0.2 millilitres," Mrs. Malfoy said. "That must be these small lines here, see it says one millilitre on this big line here."

Professor Snape bent over to survey the lines, then pulled out his wand and transferred some of the liquid into the syringe.

"That should be sufficient."

Hermione watched the syringe. It was half full of liquid. Why give her a muggle contraceptive? There are certain strong magics that can destroy contraceptive charms, but they were rare and not typically in average households.

"Where do we stick it in?" Mrs. Malfoy conferred with the Professor.

"I suspect this one goes in muscle. Some go directly into the bloodstream, I understand. Maybe the arm," he said as he picked up the needle and moved it towards Hermione's arm.

"You have to remove the air," Hermione said. "Things will go really badly for me if you don't."

Professor Snape stared at her for a bit, obviously not sure what to do.

"Would you like me to do it?" Hermione asked.

He thought for a moment and then relented. Hermione took the syringe, careful not to touch anything with the needle. Maybe they believed that someone would purposefully remove the charms, which can happen. There was no one who knew how to remove a muggle contraceptive. It probably could be done, she mused, but the magical community just didn't have the chemistry knowledge to do it. But why would anyone remove her charms anyway? Unless they thought Draco would remove the charms, but that was ridiculous. Why would they even think that?

Hermione turned the needle upside down and pushed out the air before sticking it in her leg. She hated being forced to medicate herself, but on the other hand, she really didn't want to get pregnant. Not that she really believed that was an issue, but it wouldn't do any harm.

"You can go," Professor Snape said to her after she put the syringe back on the table.

Hermione removed herself from the kitchen as swiftly as she could. She took the opportunity to go out in the garden. That little encounter had been so far away from her expectations, she didn't know what to make of it. She guessed they weren't sending her away after all. She wasn't sure if she was disappointed or not. She wasn't happy, but maybe better the devil you know.

Maybe they were all just mad, she thought while sitting down on a cold wet bench. She had some serious doubts about Draco's sanity at times. Maybe they were all slightly unhinged. Or maybe they just all had serious concerns about Draco's sanity.

She stayed outside as long as her body would let her, only going back inside when her fingers had truly turned blue. The sun was starting its descent as she said her goodbye to the garden and returned to Draco's room.

He was there when she returned, sitting in one of the large chairs cradling his head in his hands.

"Where have you been?" he asked. She could tell he was tired and grumpy. He had served himself a large glass of whiskey.

"I went for a walk outside," Hermione said.

"Come here," he ordered and she obeyed.

He pulled her into his lap and kept her there for a while.

"You're cold." He pulled Hermione's shoulder into leaning on him.

"It is cold outside."

"Why were you cold? Didn't you have a jacket?"

"I forgot it."

"You're not to go outside without a jacket," he said and brushed her hair with his fingers.

He slowly leant his head up to kiss her. She let him, but didn't respond. After a few seconds he abandoned the kiss and sighed.

"You should go take your bath. It should warm you up," he said and slapped her lightly on the backside to get her to stand up.

Hermione went into the bathroom to run the bath. When ready, she undressed and got into the warm water. The heat burned her cold skin for a while as she got in. She let her mind drift a little in the warm water but was eventually disturbed by Draco. He sat down on the bottom edge of the tub.

Hermione wondered about him. Wondered about what his mother was thinking about him. She didn't really know him that well. She knew his immediate likes and dislikes, but something was obviously making his mother concerned.

"I brought you a present," he said and leaned back on the wall. He pulled a little box out of his pocket and reached it out towards her.

She took the little box reluctantly and studied it. It was a small ornate box made of silver. It was beautiful and when she opened it, it started playing music. A music box. It was exquisite, but Hermione wondered where it came from. Was this some box he had picked up from some dead woman's dresser. She didn't want to think about where he had picked it up. Was it a gift from some lover before he stole it.

"I don't want it," she said and handed it back.

His eyes seemed to darken as she tried to get him to take it back.

"It's a gift and you're keeping it," he said before getting up and walking off. He left the room completely.

When Hermione got out and got dressed, there was a dinner tray waiting for her. She felt guilty being served dinner when the creatures downstairs were waiting for food. Waiting for whatever she left on the plate. Hermione ate as little as she could.

Draco returned about an hour and a half later. She could smell Port and cigars on him as he passed her to poured himself another whiskey.

"Mother wants you to serve dinner again," he said quietly.

"I am a servant. It is what I do."

"Then ask me to prevent it and I will free you from the duty," he said raising his voice.

"Why?" she asked. 'How about you free me from this,' she said holding up her bracelet. "I will literally beg you on my knees."

"Fine. Serve like the slave you are," he said and went into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him.

He remained in there for an hour. When he got out, he made Hermione get into bed with him. He was warm from the bath he had. He slowly freed her from the dress before starting to kiss her skin again, returning to her mouth every once in a while. He took his time to build up the sensation in her body again, again making her breath catch in the throat as he administered this new brand of torture on her most sensitive bits. But she wouldn't relent to the sensation and he could not get beyond that limit her mind had control over. Her body was aching for release, but she wouldn't go there.

He didn't make a secret of how much he loved the moisture that pooled in her body. It seemed to disturb his control and speed up his finish.



Again, Hermione was left with an ache in her body.

“I will have all of you,” he whispered in her ear before turning off the lights with his wand.

Over my dead body, Hermione thought to herself.

## Chapter 15

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### Chapter 15

Draco was still in a bad mood the next day. He didn't speak to her as she dressed for breakfast service. It was a relief to spend a few moments downstairs away from his sulking, but she had to endure it throughout the breakfast service. Mrs. Malfoy did her best to cheer her family up by commenting on how excited Blaise Zabini must be expecting his first child. Apparently that time of life was just wonderful in Mrs. Malfoy's view. So precious.

"Perhaps one day, you will know just that joy, my love," she said, obviously working her way up to discussing Draco's marriage prospects again.

Draco was not taking the turn of the conversation well and Hermione could tell that his frustration was building. Suddenly he stood up and forcefully sent all of his breakfast crashing to the floor.

"What is the matter with you?" Mrs. Malfoy said while Hermione went over to start cleaning it up.

"Clean it up, mudblood," he yelled.

"Draco!" Mrs. Malfoy said shocked.

"No, let her mother, she likes it," he said and gave her a shove with his boot where she was crouched.

Hermione couldn't keep her balance and fell over on the mess on the floor, while Draco turned and stormed out of the room. After a moment of silent conversation between husband and wife, Lucius folded his copy of the Daily Prophet and left as well. Hermione stayed and cleaned up the mess, while Mrs. Malfoy stubbornly finished her breakfast. Hermione noted the tension in the room that told her the Mrs. Malfoy was likely going to go find someplace to cry once she had allowed herself to finish breakfast.

Hermione did her best to clean the mess off her legs and dress hem before returning upstairs. Today she would clean the library. It was a place she had avoided, but she would tackle it today. She hated the book smell, but she was running out of places to clean. The other option was to start cleaning all the various paintings, who would inevitably swear at her the whole time. They never liked being messed with and particularly by a person such as herself, who had no concern about taking good care of them.

She started by dusting the shelves and all surfaces and that alone would take half a day. Draco returned to the house shortly after lunch and called her up to his room.

"I'm sorry," he said when she got there. "I lost my temper."

He pulled out his wand and cleaned some of the grease stains off her dress that she couldn't quite remove on her own.

"I don't understand why you fight me at every turn. I am only trying to make things easier for you," he continued to Hermione's silence.

"I have to go," he said when he finished. "The muggles have entered Diagon Alley. No one can believe it, but they have taken over the Leaky Cauldron. Tom the barkeep has been taken. Luckily, the place was practically deserted at the time. The Dark Lord is furious, it is a real blow for his image. He had ordered everyone to help sort this out before too many people find out about it."

He pulled her into a hug and kissed her on the side of her head.

"I have to go," he said and left.

Hermione's mind was reeling. Somewhere the complete duality of Draco's person made a twinge but mostly the fact that the muggles were now in the wizard world. She knew how strong they were, their planning capability, their weapons and resourcefulness, but she never truly believed that they could enter the wizard world. But here they are. What does that mean?

Hermione went for a walk in the garden to think about the implications. She wore her coat this time, so at least her upper body was relatively warm. She recognised that this latest development raised the stakes enormously. She found Neville somewhere in the misty landscape.

"Hey Moine. How are you doing? You're skinny as a little bird."

"I'm all right Neville. Glad to see you. Have you heard about Diagon Alley?"

"Yeah. It happened this morning. Quite a development. Somehow the muggles have broken through all the charms. They haven't gotten beyond the Leaky Cauldron from what I hear, but the Death Eaters are trying to hold them back," Neville said.

Hermione was surprised how much Neville knew about it.

"Do you think they will be able to?"

"I don't know," Neville responded. "We will just have to wait and see. I don't think this ever figured into 'his' plan though."

"I wonder what this means," Hermione said, deep in thought. "Maybe they can't take the muggles?"

Neville only looked at her. "We will just have to wait and see," he repeated.

"Take care of yourself," Hermione said before leaving.

"You too," Neville said. "If it gets dicey, keep your head low. Promise."

Hermione nodded and returned to the house. She still had the library to tackle. She picked up her wipes and bucket and started to clean some of the surfaces. Many of the tables had fingerprints all along the edges of the glossy wooden tables. There were books strewn on one of the tables. She hadn't noticed them before, but she tends not to notice such things anymore. She started to return them to the appropriate places. There were mostly about anti-muggle charms, so most were going back to the same place. A couple was on wizard muggle warfare through the ages.

"I would like to know what your intentions are towards my son," she heard a voice from one of the darker corners. It made her jump and drop the book she was holding.

She turned to see Lucius sitting in one of the large leather chairs. He blended in with the darkness really well if it wasn't for the blond hair.

"I have no intentions towards your son," she stated.

"You seem to have some power over him."

"Really?" she said bitterly. "So far he seems to do whatever he wants."

"He has not been himself lately. I think you are a bad influence on him."

"Is that right?" she said. "You figure it is all down to my influence?"

"His affection for you goes against the natural order," Lucius said coldly.

"Natural order?" Hermione responded. "Do you think there is anything natural about this?"

"This is how it should be. Transitions are always painful, but inevitable."

"There is nothing natural about this, Mr. Malfoy. I have never liked your son and never will, but I have always been honest about the natural order and the natural order is that your son should be king of the world, out having the time of his life. Getting drunk with his friends, screwing everything that moves. Instead he is with me, a mudblood, spending every spare minute in his room hiding."

"It is only a transition," he said after a moment of silence.

"Well for your sake, Mr. Malfoy, I hope there is something left of the world when you're done, because I don't think there will be anything left of your son," Hermione was shaking in anger.

"Watch your tongue girl or I will take your voice," he threatened.

Hermione chided herself for wasting her time. She certainly didn't care if he took her voice. Instead she mustered her strength and gave a little courtesy.

"Will there be anything else this afternoon?" she asked. She just wanted to finish this conversation and be away from there.

He waved her off and Hermione started towards the door.

"If I had any assurance that it wouldn't make things worse, I would kill you," he said coldly.

"Whatever," she mumbled under her breath. There was a time when such a threat would have had her shaking in her boots, but those days were long gone. She couldn't believe that she had just defended the brat that Draco was. She had hated him, but she would much rather have a world where he was entitled to be a total prat, then whatever world they were trying to build now. Maybe he knew that too as trying his very best to hang onto the past. Maybe he knew that the future was untenable.

But typical purebloods, they would blame everything on the mudblood, just like Lucius had just tried to blame the effects of this war on Draco as a consequence of her influence. Just pathetic. They really did deserve an ass-kicking by the muggles. And this was the stupid man that Stina had devoted her affections to. He didn't give a stuff about her according to his view on the natural order of things, or else he was lying through his teeth to himself. Which could also be a possibility. They were world champions at justifying their own actions.

Neither Lucius or Draco was back for dinner so Hermione ended up serving Mrs. Malfoy alone. She was nervous about whatever was going on outside the house.

Hermione had her bath as she always did and was ordered to do. It was strange to be alone in the evenings. She didn't miss him of course, that would be lunacy.

It was close to midnight when Draco returned. He was exhausted and crawled into bed, pulling Hermione tight and going to sleep right away. He smelt of smoke. Not cigarettes, but fire smoke. It was unusual for him to go to bed less than clean, but he seemed too tired to do anything about it.

He was slightly snoring again like he always did when he was really tired. She could almost feel a little sympathy for him. Not that he deserved any sympathy from her, but his situation wasn't enviable. He obviously didn't want to be part of this war. He had made his feelings on it known a number of times to her and his family. She hadn't really recognised before today that he wanted things back the way they were. Maybe nothing reminded you of home like the prissy girl you used to bully. Doesn't explain why you have said prissy girl in your bed, though.

## Chapter 16

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### Chapter 16

Draco had his bath in the morning. He didn't ask Hermione to bathe him, but ordered her to stay instead of serving breakfast.

"It's going to get messy today," he said while lying in the bath. "The muggles are pushing forwards, they are destroying everything in their way. If there is a building in the way, they just burning it down. We're holding them back, but it's exhausting shielding all their attacks. We're going to have to do some rebuilding when this is all over."

"What if you can't?" Hermione asked.

"What if we can't what?"

"Hold them back."

"Of course we can. They are just formulating the plan now. It took us by surprise that's all."

There was a large breakfast waiting for him and he ate as much as he could. More than he normally would. Hermione guessed he hadn't eaten anything last night.

After he ate, he got dressed.

"I'll see you tonight. Be here when I get back," he said and kissed her before going.

Hermione watched the door for a while after he'd left. This playing house thing had to stop, she thought to herself. He was treating her like a subservient wife. He was apologizing to her, claiming he was trying to make things better for her, giving her presents. His behaviour which in and of itself was just weird, but the fact that he wanted her to stop performing her servant's duties was just completing the twisted little picture. Well she refused to step into his little, deluded dreamscape. With that she decided to go clean something.

The day passed just like most did. She didn't speak to anyone with the exception of some of the less nasty looking Malfoy ancestors. She discovered in that regard that looks can be deceiving. That angelic-looking blond woman had a mouth on her that would make bum crack sporting truck drivers blush.

Neville wasn't around. Some woman came over to try to tempt Mrs. Malfoy out of the house, but she refused to leave in case someone came home. Other than that, nothing could be heard in the house.

She had no idea when Draco would be home. He wanted her to be there waiting for him. Judging from yesterday, it could be really late. They prepared for dinner service anyway, but no one turned up. They ate really well that evening.

Shortly after eight, she could hear a commotion downstairs. Draco was home, he was yelling. She couldn't make it out, but she could tell that he was coming upstairs. He burst into

the room and continued striding to the bathroom. He was covered in soot and blood. He didn't even look at her but slammed the door behind him, locking it.

Mrs. Malfoy came rushing into the room after him.

"Draco, my love. Let me in," she said and tried to open the bathroom door.

"He's dead. He's fucking dead. Leave me alone," Draco yelled through the door.

"Please sweetheart. Let me in," Mrs. Malfoy pleaded.

"For what? In some useless fucking war that doesn't even make sense!" Draco continued yelling.

Mrs. Malfoy was crying. Obviously someone had died. Maybe Lucius.

"Just leave me alone," Draco yelled again.

"I just want to help," she pleaded.

"How exactly are you supposed to help? You can't fix this, Mother."

"I am so sorry," she continued.

Professor Snape came into the room and started to urge Mrs. Malfoy away from the bathroom door.

"Your husband requires you," he informed Mrs. Malfoy.

She nodded through her tears and started to leave. As she saw Hermione sitting on a chair along one of the walls, she stopped and stared.

"Comfort him," she ordered.

Hermione couldn't stop her mouth from gaping as she tried to formulate a response. In the end she decided to just keep her mouth shut. Mrs. Malfoy continued out of the room.

"Blaise Zabini was killed this evening," Professor Snape said to her before leaving the room as well.

Nothing comforts you when your best friend dies. She knew this, surely they do too. What exactly were they expecting her to do? She's the enemy for god's sake.

She could hear the shower running. He typically preferred the bath, but not tonight. He was crying, she could hear him sobbing.

Hermione stayed in her chair listening to Draco crying in the bathroom for an hour. She felt very uncomfortable listening to his misery. Even though she had wished it on him more times than she could remember, it was unbearable to sit and listen to it. It also brought back so many memories of the people she had lost. The night Harry died and the early morning raid that had killed Ron. And all the others.

Well they were reaping what they had sown, she thought bitterly. All the misery they had caused. She was sorry Blaise was dead, she had never really known him. Sorry for his unborn child who would never know him, but they brought this on themselves. War doesn't benefit anyone.

After a long time. Draco came out of the bedroom and dressed in some pants. A dinner tray had appeared for him, which he picked at but nothing seemed to go in his mouth. After abandoning the dinner tray he hit the whiskey decanter, downing a large glass, then refilling.

He was not a pretty sight when he cried. His eyes were red and puffy. She had never seen him cry before. Harry had said he'd caught Draco crying in the bathroom before Harry cut him into pieces. The fact that he could cry had been a shock to her at the time.

"Blaise's dead," he stated.

"I heard," Hermione said. "Professor Snape informed me."

Draco stared at her for a while then went out on the balcony and had a cigarette. She could smell the acrid smoke where she was still sitting. She felt uncomfortable, like she was intruding on something private. But she also knew that he wouldn't send her away. He didn't like being alone.

She decided to do something with herself and started a fire. Without a wand, she had to do it the cumbersome way. The slow, muggle way. Draco was walking around with his shirt off and the warmth from the shower would probably dissipate soon.

When he came inside, he lay down on the bed and curled up.

"Would it kill you to pretend that you cared, you heartless whore."

Hermione just stood by the fire and absorbed his anger. It didn't hurt. She understood it. Obviously he wanted her to make some kind of gesture to comfort him. She didn't want to deal with this at all. She would rather be downstairs folding linen than having to deal with this. Why wouldn't he recognise that she didn't want to be here.

She moved over to the bed and sat down leaning on the headboard. She started to stroke his hair in an attempt to comfort. There was always sex, but he would take that when he was ready. She had no doubt what so ever.

He moved his head onto her thigh and circled his arms around her leg. He was crying again and Hermione could feel the hot wet tears on her skin. She continued to stroke his hair until he fell asleep. He really did look pitiful curled up against her leg. She didn't want to feel sympathy for him. It doesn't make up for the things he/they had done to her.

How much pain would he have to be in before she would let herself feel sympathy for him, she wondered. Maybe she was a heartless whore; exactly as they had made her. She had always thought she was protecting her sanity or functionality through her indifference, maybe it was costing her even more.

Yesterday she had defended him after doing her very best to defy him. Today, when he was truly a mess, she had just shut down. Effectively refused to engage with him. If she caved now, there would be no going back.

After a long time stroking his hair, she wiggled out from under his head and placed a blanket on his half-nude body before laying down to go to sleep. She didn't want to think anymore.

He woke up in the middle of the night and had sex with her. It was quick, jerky and quiet. He held her really tightly throughout and wouldn't move off her after. She didn't mind if he



took from her tonight. Better this than having to deal with him on an emotional level.

The next morning he stayed in bed. He had sex with her again in the morning, but wouldn't look at her. Afterwards he went back to sleep cuddled up to her back.

They were woken by Mrs. Malfoy quietly entering the room. Hermione took the opportunity to go spend some time in the bathroom, when Mrs. Malfoy sat down next to Draco.

When she got back, Mrs. Malfoy was gone and Draco was still in the position she had left him in. Draco indicated for her to return to the bed so she did.

"The funeral is arranged for tomorrow," he said. "Pansy has left for America. So she won't be there."

"I'm sorry," Hermione said.

"Are you?" he asked. "I wonder if you are."

Hermione didn't respond. Part of her wasn't sorry. Part of her felt that this was inevitable and they had brought it on themselves. Just desserts for dishing it out to so many people before now. Probably still are as far as she knew.

"Sometimes I wonder if you feel anything at all."

She certainly did her utmost not to.

"So cold," he said and reached out and stroked her lips with his thumb. "You've never given an inch, have you? Always turned your back on me whenever I looked at you."

"You were always sneering," she said, which made him smile.

"They always said Slytherins had a capacity for cruelty, but it's really nothing compared to Gryffindors," he said and leaned in to kiss her softly and gently. Hermione didn't respond.

Hermione thought that was a ridiculously false statement, but she wasn't about to argue the point.

"You're all I've got left now. I am never letting you go, so get used to it."

Hermione turned over and faced away from him.

"You'll grow to love me. Father says women are creatures of love and they always grow to love in the end. Mother did."

Oh yes, Lucius Malfoy's wisdom on love, how could you go wrong, Hermione snorted to herself. A breakfast tray appeared on the desk.

"You should eat," Hermione said.

"I'm not hungry."

"You didn't eat last night."

"I don't want to eat," he stated more forcefully. "You have it."

Hermione took the invitation and got out of bed to get the tray before returning it to the bed.

She handed a piece of toast to Draco.

“They could call you back to Diagon Alley anytime so eat.”

“I don’t care about this fucking war,” he spat. “I can’t just forget about what happened yesterday. I can’t just get over it. He’s gone.”

Draco reached up to press his eyes like he was fighting tears again.

“I know,” Hermione said while laying down to face him on the bed. “You never will. You just put one foot in front of the other and get on. Suppress your feelings and gear up for the next fight because it’s coming whether you like it or not. Just do it.”

“And that’s what you did,” he stated.

“Yes.”

“This sucks,” he said and tucked his arms around his chest.

## Chapter 17

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### Chapter 17

Draco did manage some breakfast before leaving at around 10. Blaise's funeral was being held just before lunch.

Soon after he had gone, Hermione was being summoned by Mrs. Malfoy. On arrival, she was given a box and told to hide it in the attic somewhere. Mrs. Malfoy was dressed for the funeral as well.

The box contained some of Draco's school things. Pictures and other items that must have sentimental value. Mrs. Malfoy obviously wanted to hide anything that would remind Draco of Blaise. It was strange seeing the pictures, full of Slytherins looking happy and arrogant. Draco looked arrogant, just like he was then. It had been years since she had seen any of them other than Draco.

She dropped the photo's back in the box and went upstairs where she knew the attic access was. She'd never been up there. The attic room had a fairly high ceiling and it was a large, cold expanse full of old furniture, tapestries and all sorts of miscellaneous items piled on every surface. Some of it looked like it was decomposing on the spot. The only light came from the small windows. She had to look around for a while to find a suitable spot for the box. There was an empty bookcase further along that would serve the purpose well. She had to squeeze past a dirty bed resting on its side to reach it.

She hurried out of there as fast as she could before she met any inhabitants of the space, whose mercy she would be at without a wand. She wasn't sure she subscribed to Mrs. Malfoy's take on dealing with grief but she could understand it.

The house was quiet for a few hours after. Hermione spent most of the time looking for Neville but she couldn't find him. It had been a few days now that he had been absent and she was starting to worry.

Draco got home at four and he looked fairly drained. He certainly looked different from the school photos she had seen that morning. He headed for his whiskey decanters and sat down in one of the chairs.

"Where's Neville?" Hermione demanded.

"What?" Draco asked looking annoyed.

"Did you send him away again? He hasn't been here for days."

"I haven't done anything to him," Draco responded lighting a cigarette. "I've got bigger problems to worry about than keeping track of the gardener."

"He always turns up when he's supposed to. Why isn't he here?"

"How should I know?" Draco said.

“Can you ask? Can you ask and see if he is alright?” Hermione pleaded.

Draco shrugged. “Fine. I will ask if it means that much to you.”

They sat in silence for a long time while Draco drank and smoked. Hermione didn’t feel the need to break the silence. Draco was wearing his finest clothes and not the Deatheater uniform he normally had on.

“I have to go down to dinner tonight,” he said after a long silence. “You stay here. Have a bath while I’m gone.”

After sorting through some of his mail that had built up over the last few days, he left for dinner. Hermione went for her bath. She still thanked Professor Snape every day for fixing her dress so she didn’t have to sit around in a towel all night. A small tray of food appeared for her after a while which she was grateful for because she had forgotten to eat when she was running around looking for Neville.

Some hours later, Draco returned to resume his previous position and activities.

“Bad news about your friend,” he stated.

“Neville? What? What’s happened?” Hermione asked feeling her heart skipping beats.

“Seems he has been collaborating with the muggles.”

“That’s impossible. It’s Neville. You know Neville,” she said disbelievingly.

“Maybe he has and maybe he hasn’t. It doesn’t matter, he’s been accused. It’s over for him.”

Hermione didn’t know what to say next.

“What’s going to happen to him?” she asked when she managed to get her tongue working again. The thought of losing Neville was just unbearable.

“He’ll be killed,” Draco said absently.

“But he is still alive.”

“Well, it seems that the Dark Lord is rather busy with the muggles at the moment,” Draco snapped.

“Draco, you have to help him,” Hermione pleaded.

“What do you expect me to do? Plead for leniency, that would just end up getting both of us killed.”

“It’s Neville,” Hermione shouted. “You went to school with him.”

“There is nothing I can do, Granger. Not even my father could influence this one. Apparently, he has been collaborating with the muggles for a while.”

“Please Draco, he is all I have left. You must get him out.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking,” Draco said raking his hair. “You can’t just go and steal one of the Dark Lord’s prisoners. That would be suicide.”

"You have to try," Hermione continued. She was not going to rest until he helped Neville. She couldn't just sit by. There must be a way. Let me go and I will do it. "She said.

"And how would you even find him?" Draco said. "You think they are just going to open the doors and let you in. They know who you are and there is too many for you to force your way."

"You know where he is," Hermione stated.

Draco just shook his head like it was the most ridiculous idea ever.

"You'll get killed. He will get killed," Draco finally said.

"I can't just sit by and watch the only person I care about be killed," Hermione yelled.

Draco shrugged again, while Hermione tried frantically for another tact to get Draco to help.

"I know you can do this," she said after a while and he glared at her. "I know you could pull this off."

"I would be risking my life. For someone I don't even know. No."

"Please Draco. If I have anything to bargain with I will."

He just stared at her and rolled his eyes shut.

"Please... Please, Draco."

He reached up his hand to shut her up.

"And what will you bargain with?" he asked tersely.

"Anything you want," Hermione responded, elated that she was getting some traction, worried because she would have to bargain for it.

"When I kiss you, I want you to kiss me back," he said bitterly. "When I touch you, I want you to feel it."

Hermione chewed her lip until she drew blood. It was a price she didn't want to pay, but she would. She hated him for asking her to, but if it got Neville out it would be worth it.

"Fine," she said.

Draco closed his eyes again and let his head drop onto the chair back.

Hermione let out the ragged breath she had been holding. Relief washed over her as she gasped for oxygen. This had to work. There was no other option. It just had to.

Draco finished his drink and stood up. He walked over to her.

"I will free him. For you."

He reached down to kiss her, but she turned her head away.

"When he is free," she said. "You've bargained for a whore and you've got one when Neville is free."

She noticed Draco's jaw muscles working as he straightened and made for the door.

"If you would care to notice," he said as he walked out the door, "you've got a lot more in this world that you account for. Obviously nothing you value."

Draco was gone for ages. Hermione was pacing the room trying to keep her mind from assuming the worst. She was fairly certain Draco could pull it off. He was pretty clever when it came to scheming. She had herself bore the brunt of his plans numerous times at school. She didn't underestimate his ability to deceive and manipulate.

A growing concern was what she would do when he got back. She had just bargained her favours for his services, which made her sick to her stomach. It wasn't so much the actual sex because she had completely engaged with him in that respect once before. She had used him and she is using him now. And it really didn't sit well with her.

On the other hand, she still couldn't quite believe that she had talked Draco into doing it. Nothing in her reference sphere would indicate that Draco Malfoy would risk anything to save Neville Longbottom.

Hermione was exhausted from thinking, so she lay down on the bed and tried to quieten her mind. Draco returned around 3 in the morning.

"He is safely in America," he said.

"I can't believe you did it."

"Well, thanks for the vote of confidence," Draco said. Hermione could tell that he was pleased with his achievement.

"Will you get in trouble?" she asked.

"Only if I am really unlucky. They would have to examine my wand to prove it."

"I thought accusation is enough."

He didn't say anything but started to undress.

He rolled into bed and pulled her close. He kissed her and it took Hermione a moment to get her mind around the idea of kissing him back. It was difficult to let her lips soften to receive the kiss, but once she got over the hurdle it became easier. She knew this taste so well. Somehow it had adopted itself into her brain somewhere along the way.

She contemplated imagining someone else, but couldn't. They were the softest, gentlest kisses she had ever felt. He was always gentle with her when he managed to wheedle himself further into her psyche, she remembered. Damn him, the bastard.

"Why did you do this?" she whispered.

"Because I need this," he responded before kissing her again.

He broke from her mouth and moved down her body, building sensation within her as he went along. He took one of her nipples in his mouth and swirled his tongue around it until responded completely. She would be fighting by now, but she had agreed to stop fighting. The reins that she had held so tightly just slipped out of her fingers. His fingers found her most sensitive nub and the pressure he placed on it made her gasp. So much of her control before

had been related to her breathing, but now it was just flowing in and out on its own, bringing oxygen to fuel the fire.

Her body was obviously relishing in its ability to pursue its sensations after being denied for so long. It really wasn't shy about making the most of this opportunity.

He continued to massage her nub until she felt tension building up in her belly and started to shift to seek more intimacy and relief. He let one of his fingers enter her and her belly seemed to turn over itself in response. But instead of giving her more, he pulled it out and left her while he adjusted himself to enter her properly.

She felt a chill when he abandoned her for the few seconds he needed. But the heat returned as he slid into her. The feeling of fullness was lovely now that she wasn't doing her absolute best to suppress it. The friction as he moved was winding the coil of tension tighter and tighter until her hips had to shift to find relief. Her body was hurling towards this stolen release like a chain reaction irrespective of what her mind thought. The intense waves shook her consciousness as they washed over her.

He was gritting his teeth like he was trying to delay his own release, but was losing the fight. He shuttered violently before seeking out her mouth again between breaths.

After, he pulled her into him again like he did every night and immediately fell into an exhausted sleep.

Hermione couldn't sleep. She hated the fact that what had just happened had felt so natural; her body had just fallen into step. She was so used to him, his smell, his taste, his skin. It had just felt so easy and natural. Part of her felt dirty, maybe it was that it felt so natural that made her feel dirty. But the part that really hurt was that he had won a battle in their own private war.

She wasn't sorry, however, it had saved Neville and she would do it again in a heartbeat. In actuality, she would probably have to do it again tomorrow. But the fact was that she had bargained something that should be a sacred thing, and she blamed him for it.

## Chapter 18

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### Chapter 18

Hermione was woken up by Draco's alarm a few hours later. He groaned at having to get up, his body seemed to struggle to obey the commands related to deserting the warm bed for the cold winters morning. He ignored it for a while and pulled her closer. The warmth was perfect. After a few minutes, he pulled her onto her back so he could kiss her. She didn't struggle, knowing she had agreed not to and being much too tired to even think about it.

He explored her entire mouth and she let him. She wasn't exactly going to do the same, that was a step too far, she decided, while at the same time kicking herself for creating these incremental little boundaries which were now meaningless in the scheme of things. The idea of being without physical boundaries was scary, it seemed to invite loosening of emotional boundaries and that was somewhere she would just not go. Never.

Draco groaned again and pulled away from her. He quickly got out of bed and dressed in his more typical black pants, robes and boots. He did look so utterly forbidding when dressed in his Death eater garb. She knew he had to go off to Diagon Alley and fight the muggles.

After returning from the bathroom, with his face shaven and hair brushed, he stood and watched her for a second before quickly returning to the bed and lying down on top of her blankets. He sought another deep kiss.

"Sometimes, I think you're the only thing holding me together."

He continued kissing her lightly. He obviously loved kissing, or being kissed. Maybe after having been denied for so long.

He pulled away abruptly and hissed as his mark was telling him he was needed elsewhere. He dashed out the door, leaving Hermione too awake and too disturbed to go back to sleep. She sat up and rubbed her head with the palms of her hands.

She hadn't really considered the implications of what she agreed to last night. She was so caught up in saving Neville, she hadn't really considered the cost to her. This was going to be incredibly taxing for her and she needed to find some way of coping with this. She would never regret it, because Neville was alive and well and that was worth everything. Obviously the cool detachment thing wasn't really working so well when you're kissing someone, so now what?

She did believe him when he said she was holding him together. She was his vent, a place to focus on and a useful strategy when everything else was awful. Her anger served the same purpose for her sometimes. She would focus on her anger whenever the imposition grew too large. It was what was holding her together, because it still felt like the largest betrayal of what she was and what she stood for by letting him touch her, and even more so by touching him back.



Maybe she just thought too much, she decided. Maybe she just needs to go from one minute to the next, doing her best to survive. She got up and dressed in her blue baby doll dress. The bare legs were getting pretty uncomfortable on these cold winter mornings. Some hard scrubbing will fix that in no time.

She was going to clean windows today, she decided. It was a fairly physical job and it would keep her warm.

The weather was gray and dark outside. It was drizzling and every surface shone in cold wetness. She might stick to the inside of the windows today, leave the outside for a nice sunny day.

Somehow her fingers just didn't seem to want to co-operate today. She was clumsy and kept on dropping the cloth and the squeegee. There was a tension in her body and seemed to twitch through her every now and then. She was making a hatchet job of the windows.

Maybe she needed to eat some more, she thought. She sat down and just stared out the window for a while. The tension was growing up her back and her arms were becoming lethargic. The scenery outside was mesmerising. After some time she focused back inside and noticed that her hands felt like they were floating in water. It was a funny sensation and she laughed a little, when a hippogriff flew by and landed on the patio outside. It pranced around a bit, looked at her and flew off. It was the strangest thing she had ever seen. Then she passed out.

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Hermione only regained consciousness for very short periods to every possible feeling of badness. Usually she could seek out a silver lining to every bad situation, but this was all bad. The conscious moments seemed to string together into a symphony of pain and awfulness.

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Her consciousness seemed to surface again, being called by a voice to wake up. Slowly her eyes blinked open, the light was killing her, but she slowly grew accustomed. A wave of pain hit her as her mind seemed to reconnect with her body. Why wake up to this, she thought.

"Drink this, Miss Granger." She heard the voice again.

She made an attempt to comply out of sheer ingrained manners, but nothing in her body was following instruction. She blinked open again to see Professor Snape sitting near her. That sharpened her attention somewhat from the jumble of incoherent thoughts and mind flashes.

"Can you move?" He asked.

She tried to nod but wasn't successful.

"This will make you feel a little better." He said and lifted her head up to pour some liquid in. The movement made her head explode in pain, but it settled long enough for her to see that she was naked. Oh, just great. No, not naked, something else.

She choked a bit on the potion because she couldn't make her tongue work properly.

“You’ve been ill.” The professor said when her head was down on the pillow again. “You are recovering now, although I suppose it wouldn’t feel like it yet.”

“You have Dragon Pox. It usually inflicts the elderly, but it seems you have an immune system comparable to a ninety year old.” He continued in his clipped tones.

Doesn’t that make you green, Hermione’s mind yelled.

“It makes you green with nasty boils. And it’s permanent, but Draco has been very diligent in keeping you covered in Peruvian mud. It draws out the toxins that turn the skin green. Once you are completely washed off, we will see how successful he has been.”

“You owe him a great deal, Miss Granger. This disease is often lethal, and it is highly contagious. Most usually get cared for by an elderly house elf, but Draco hasn’t left your side in three days.” He said and looked over towards the couch where Hermione assumed Draco must be. She listened and could hear the light snoring sound he makes whenever he was really tired.

“He had taken somewhat of a battering in the Dark Lord’s esteem for it.” The Professor said as he stood up. “Deserting the battle to go care for your sick muggleborn house servant is seen by some as a bit of a no-no.”

“Go back to sleep.” The Professor ordered. “You will feel better when you wake up next.”

Hermione’s body didn’t need convincing and she was out before he finished his sentence.

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She was woken again by the feeling of someone stroking her face. When she opened her eyes, Draco was leaning on her.

“Hey.” He said softly with a great smile of relief. “Didn’t I tell you that you were never leaving me.”

Her body still ached and it still refused to follow any of her commands.

“Let’s get you cleaned off.” He said and lifted her off the bed. He carried her towards the bathroom where a warm bath was waiting.

He stepped into the bath, getting in himself as he lowered her down. He was still dressed, she would feel his soft cotton shirt as he held her in the bath. She still couldn’t move a muscle as he started cleaning the mud off her with a cloth.

It was disconcerting being in the water without being able to move. If he let her go, she would drown. She had to trust him to keep her head above the water. He started by cleaning her face, then moved down while trying to hold her.

The water was completely opaque once he finished washing every bit of her. He drained it and held her to him as it refilled.

“Could be worse.” He said examining her face.

Just light green then, Hermione thought to herself. She wanted to laugh but couldn’t.

She looked up at him as he examined her body. What had he done, she wanted to ask. If he left the fight to go care for her there would be ramifications for him, probably for both of them. He really is burning the candle at both ends now. There is no way things will be able to continue as they were, Hermione realised. The things he's done to protect this little haven he had established for himself will come to an end sooner by those very same actions. Although she had done the same thing with Neville in a way. Maybe they were both just two idiots trying to survive with some semblance of sanity.

He lifted her out of the bath and returned her to the bed, which had been cleaned of mud through some means. The rest of the room was an absolute bomb site. There was mud everywhere. The desk was overturned in the corner and there was parchment and papers strewn over the entire room. He dried her off as quickly as he could and stripped himself off his sodden clothes.

He dragged her across to rest of his chest as he pulled the blankets over them. Her still unresponsive hand rested across his belly as they settled down. The heat built up between them fairly quickly and Hermione thought it felt absolutely lovely. It was so wonderful to not feel bad. She gave into the lethargy in her body and relaxed her mind for once. Maybe this was just enough for now.

## Chapter 19

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### Chapter 19

Draco was gone when Hermione woke up. Her body still ached and her feet felt unstable, but she really had to go to the bathroom. She found Draco's dressing robes, which was much too large and swept the floor behind her. Once she finished in the bathroom, she checked out her complexion in the mirror. She was really pale, but at least she wasn't outright green. Whatever Draco had done had worked, but she wasn't the same as before. She looked really pale and her skin had a bit of a pearly sheen to it, with a slight green sheen competing with the natural rosiness of her skin. Mostly cancelling each other out, but seemed to shift between themselves with the angle of the light. She had a bit of green where her lips met and where her eyes met, also along her hairline. She guessed the clay he used to draw the toxin didn't quite reach those places.

Her new complexion would take a bit of getting used to. It could have all turned out much worse. She wasn't sure how she felt about Draco caring for her. She wasn't sure anyone else would have done it, not during a battle, particularly going against the orders of Voldemort, which in itself was a pretty severe health hazard. She didn't quite want to acknowledge it, but neither Harry nor Ron would have spent three days exposing themselves to a deadly disease during battle to care for her. Molly Weasley might have, but she the mother to all and caring for this disease was something only a mother would do. And now Draco Malfoy.

Rationally maybe it would have been better for all involved if he had just let her die. They were both likely to be severely punished for this, and now she had to at least on some level be grateful, which she really, really didn't want. She never asked him to do this and she wouldn't have if she had the choice. But the other part of her, the one containing her survival instinct couldn't be anything but relieved that she was still living and breathing, even if only for a while.

Hermione returned to the bed and fell asleep again, but was awoken by Draco before long.

"Eat," he ordered and placed a tray of food next to her.

Her stomach revolted at the thought, but her mind overruled it, knowing she would recover much faster with nourishment.

"Thank you," she said talking about more than the food. She wanted to say that he shouldn't have, but couldn't quite voice the conflicting thoughts related to that statement.

"The muggles have taken Diagon Alley." He started to straighten out the mess.

She had wondered how the mess occurred, but wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer.

"You are going to be in trouble for leaving."

"It was pretty clear that we were losing. Nothing I could have done would have changed the outcome so why stick around to get killed."

“What’s going to happen now?” Hermione asked not sure if she meant with him or in general.

“I don’t know,” he said with a shrug. “The muggles seem to have set up some force that is impervious to our magic.”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“They have done something. Put up some barrier which our hexes and curses can’t get through. It’s not everywhere, but in specific locations, they’ve done something which renders us fairly well defenceless.”

Hermione tried to think of the implications, but the ramification’s kept on slipping through her exhausted mind.

“We must find some way of dealing with this force. Father has no idea what it is. No one has ever come across it before,” he continued talking. “The Dark Lord is livid. I don’t think he knows how to hold the muggles back. Do you know what it is?”

“No,” Hermione responded.

“Would you tell me if you did?” Draco asked watching her closely.

“You can’t seriously expect that I would help you, help Voldemort,” she stated, astounded that he would ask.

“I just helped you. No one would have cared for you if I hadn’t,” he said raising his voice.

“And that makes you think I would assist Voldemort,” she said disbelievingly. “You obviously forget that I fought on the other side. Voldemort needs to lose this war as far as I’m concerned. I never asked you to help me, by the way, that was your choice and let’s not pretend that your main concern was my well-being.”

“Oh, I just ruined my own reputation and that of my family by keeping you from dying. It certainly wasn’t for my well-being, was it?” he yelled.

“Well I’m not going to help you get back into his good graces by giving him an advantage in this war. Fuck him, fuck you.” Hermione felt the tirade stinging through her. “After everything you’ve done to me, keeping me here, raping me, how could you possibly expect that I would help you. For God’s sake, you turned me into a whore.”

“As I recall, that was your idea. I’ve bent over backwards to help you. I’ve put my life at risk twice to help you and you treat it like it’s nothing.”

“Because it is nothing to me. I never asked for any of this. I never chose to be here. I don’t want to be here. You’ve kept me here, against my will every step of the way. What the hell do you expect from me?” Hermione yelled back.

“You weren’t so unwilling a few nights back. You certainly weren’t faking it. And don’t give me some crap about being a whore, because we both know that you’re not,” he spat. “You want me and you’ve been fighting it all along. I’m not stupid, Hermione.”

“You’re completely deluded,” she stated through her gritted teeth. “I don’t want you. I never will. You’re so fucking desperate to not be alone. Go find someone who actually wants

to be with you.”

“At least I’m honest. More than I can say for you,” he said and headed for the door.

“Well, I honestly can’t stand the sight of you,” she yelled after him. “You disgust me.”

She threw a pillow after him as he slammed the door behind him. She rubbed her now aching head in an attempt to sooth it. That wasn’t the quiet and dignified ‘thank you for saving my life’ she was aiming for. He just made her blood boil and she completely lost it.

The argument had drained whatever energy she had and she slept for another couple of hours, but the tension never seemed to leave. She could hear voices walking past the door outside of the room when she woke up, which was unusual. No one ever came by this way unless they were looking for Draco. The thought of him brought back the argument as well as the trouble he was in for deserting the battle.

Draco returned about half an hour later.

“The Dark Lord is here,” he said. “You’re not to leave the room, yeah.”

Hermione nodded taking in the added gravity of the situation.

“Under the circumstances, I think it is best that we both keep a low profile,” he said and went to retrieve some whiskey. The tension in him was visible. “The manor is the new headquarters and its crawling with people.”

They sat in silence for a while, listening to the noise outside. Dinner plates came a while later and they both tried to eat. Draco kept refilling his glass after dinner and Hermione even took the odd sip here and there.

A while later, the door burst open and two Deatheaters entered the room.

“The Dark Lord wants to see the girl,” one of them said.

“No,” Draco yelled and went to draw his wand, but he was hit by a reducto type hex by one of the men and flew back onto the wall. He hit the wall hard and collapsed on the ground.

“Come, girl,” one of the men said. Hermione didn’t recognise either of them , but couldn’t quite make her legs work. Her co-operation wasn’t entirely needed as each man took hold of one of her arms and carried her along.

They walked her out of the room and down the hall towards the stairs leading downstairs. Neither of them said anything.

Oh God, she thought. This is it. They were bringing her to Voldemort and that would be the end for her. Mudbloods didn’t survive an audience with him. This was the last hour of her life, probably less. Undoubtedly there would be endless amounts of pain before she was finally dispatched. The tight grip on her arms were going to bruise. Not like it really mattered now, her thoughts rambled uncontrollably. Soon she would see her parents, Ron and Harry. Ginny and everyone else. At least Neville was safe. And Draco, he would be devastated, he was in love with her after all. It was so clear now, why hadn’t she realised it before. He was in love with her and he probably had been for a while. He had always been there at school, distracting during every victory, noticing her every emotion, leering at her every time she was reprimanded. He had always been present, drawing her attention and bringing her down.

She was marched into one of the drawing rooms where Voldemort was sitting on a chair in a raised part of the room. She noticed that Death Eaters were circled around the perimeter of the room as they threw her down on the floor in the middle of the room. Seemingly they had discarded the masks these days.

There was no leering or jibes like when she was originally caught.

"On your knees, mudblood," one of them said. She knew some of these men, but others were not there. Lucius and Professor Snape were present. It seemed that most of the men there were the old guard, there was hardly anyone under 40 in the room.

She wanted to not look at Voldemort, but she could feel his eyes burning on her skin. Eventually she looked up briefly to see the inhuman eyes of the awful creature she was apparently bowing before.

"She is the one that the Potter boy associated with?" he asked the men who affirmed his assumption.

"Raised by the muggles," someone said.

"And knowledgeable of their ways," Voldemort added quietly. His voice was sending creepy goosebumps up her spine.

"Tell me how they are neutralising our magic," he ordered.

Hermione tried to formulate something to say, but couldn't manage anything coherent.

"I would advise you to comply girl."

"I don't know," she managed in an unsteady voice.

"Perhaps some incentive," he said and Hermione's existence filled with pain. Every fibre of her being was on fire and her mind was showing her flames in a futile attempt to interpret what was happening. The pain was jarring her consciousness like something was shaking her hard. The curse let up and she slowly started regaining perspective. She was lying on the floor now. Before long she was hit by a longer curse, which violently shook her out of consciousness.

When she came back, her limbs felt like lead.

"I cannot search your mind for knowledge, girl, you have to tell me," he said in a sickly sweet voice.

Hermione could feel him preparing for another round of Cruciatus, so she started talking in an attempt to delay the unbearable pain which was so much worse than any of the other Cruciatus curses she had been subjected to. Obviously a skill he excelled at. Poor Harry, having to deal with this so young.

"I don't know what it is. Maybe some kind of electromagnetic field. It could be anything. Maybe some radiation," she prattled. "They've done it with sound. They can cancel sound."

"How is that possibly relevant?" one of the men asked impatiently.

"It's all energy in one form or another," Professor Snape said to Hermione's surprise.

"I don't understand," Voldemort's voice boomed in the room.

"The application of the equal and opposite cancels out the original," Hermione said.

"And how would muggles apply our magic?" she heard a woman say. It must have been Bellatrix but Hermione didn't bother confirming.

"I don't know," Hermione said.

"How do we stop it?" Voldemort asked, back to the sickly sweet.

Hermione had no idea. She was hit by a curse again and the pain tore through her body, which wasn't nearly strong enough to take the curse. The pain and jarring vision made her nauseous. It let up for a while and then came back before she could catch her breath.

"Perhaps a few broken bones would help."

"There must be some kind of power source," she rushed out. "If you can get the power source, you will stop it."

A wave of mumbling broke through the room.

"And what does the power source look like?" someone said.

"Its mobile, so must be batteries, or a generator. Maybe a fuel cell, the military like fuel cells."

"And what are these things? What do they look like," someone asked impatiently.

"They would be boxes. Camouflaged with paint probably," she said. She probably shouldn't be saying this, but that stupid part of her that wanted to live seemed to be taking control even though the rational part of her mind knew it probably would only extend her life by mere minutes.

"They all have boxes," someone snapped.

"They would be heavy," she continued.

"What do they look like?"

"I don't know," she said. She had tears on her cheeks that she hadn't noticed before.

Voldemort looked at her like he knew she had given all she had. This was it. Time to die.

"Well. It does not tell me much, Mudblood, but it is more than any of you have been able to tell me," he said to the group. "The Mudblood has proven more useful than any of you this week."

He was staring at her again like he was trying to figure something out. Hermione hated the fact that she had been of any use and hated it even more that she hadn't been defiant in the face of it.

"But your usefulness is perhaps now exhausted."

"If I may," she heard Lucius' voice to her utter disbelief. "My wife finds her servitude worthwhile."



Voldemort pondered the words for a few seconds.

"And your son is in love with this Mudblood, is he not?" Voldemort said to the room's complete silence. "Did he not rush to her side to heal her of illness when our men were fighting in Diagon Alley. Do not lie to me my fickle friend."

Lucius seemed to endeavour to respond. She could see his mind working to formulate a response.

"He has a certain obsession with this girl," he finally admitted in measured words. "He finds comfort in her use and it has perhaps gone a bit far."

Voldemort was scratching his fingernails up the stubble of his throat as he considered the words.

"None in your line has been steadfast in battle," Voldemort stated as matter of fact. "Blaming the girl is shameful. But I understand that our presence is a strain on your wife, I will let her keep the girl. She has provided some useful information and there may be more we need to know of the muggles considering all of you are utterly useless."

With a dismissive wave of his hand, Lucius grabbed Hermione by the arm and quickly lead her out of the room. He walked her upstairs with Hermione trying hard to stay upright.

"Stay out of sight," he said and left her.

Hermione let out a breath she had been holding. Her body refused to believe that the danger had passed and she was shaking with fear and adrenalin. She could hardly control her hand enough to open the door to Draco's room.

He was still lying on the floor where he had fallen. She knelt down beside him, her little revelation prior to torturous death came back to her and she sighed. He was in love with her.

"Stupid boy," she said quietly to no one in particular.

She stroked his hair away from his face and slightly patted on his cheek to get him to wake up. It took a while for him to return to consciousness.

He'd tried to protect her and got hurt in the process. How in the world did this happen? Why hadn't she noticed. This wasn't love like she had expected it to look like. He was a Slytherin after all and every inch so. They took what they wanted and he had. What had she expected, roses and chocolate? Slytherins in love was not a pretty sight. Most had arranged marriages and stuck to that. Perhaps it was better for everyone involved that they do not fall in love, because they wreak havoc.

Slowly his eyes blinked open but he seemed to have to try to focus his eyes.

"You're back," he said. "I thought I'd lost you."

"I was betting that way too."

He groaned as he sat up. He obviously had a concussion. She helped him over to the bed where he laid down and covered his eyes with his arm. He turned off the lights with his wand and pulled Hermione close to him.

"You're supposed to stay awake if you have a concussion," she said.

“Just shut up,” he said and pulled her in to rest her head on his chest.

“Well, I better get my ‘I told you so’ in now in case you die in your sleep,” she teased.

Draco fell asleep immediately, but Hermione still had thought whirling around her head. Her body was beyond exhausted now that the adrenalin was gone.

Unbelievably, they had both survived this day. She hated that she had folded in the heat of it and given them information. Perhaps not information that will in practicality be overly useful, she hoped. Her troubled thoughts seamlessly merged into troubled sleep.

## Chapter 20

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### Chapter 20

They both woke up by some commotion happening outside their room. They would hear people shouting further away and others running past the corridor outside. Draco got dressed and left to see what was happening. Hermione decided to get dressed as well, but she didn't leave the room. The noise seemed to continue. She went to the window in case she could see anything and the sight made her insides turn over.

There were tanks along the tree line at the edge of the mansion property. The muggle army was here and the Death Eaters must be scrambling downstairs to prepare for battle.

Hermione couldn't do anything other than cover her mouth and stare. There was muggle military as far as the window would let her see. She was pretty sure the entire house was surrounded. They were going to attack.

She stepped back from the window, but still didn't know what to do. She had been in battle more times than she cared to remember but not with the muggle military. She looked around and noticed that the pictures weren't moving so whatever magic neutralising force the muggles had created was being used. This meant nothing magical would work, not their wands, not the floo network. They were stuck here and the muggles were about to attack.

How in the world did this happen, Hermione thought. Did no one keep watch while the muggles walked up and surrounded their headquarters. Of course they were too arrogant to expect that, she wagered. Stupid, stupid purebloods. Well now it was time to pay. Now they were neutralised and cornered.

The implications were spinning around in her head. They were really going to lose this war. The war would be over and normalcy would resume, and the day of the purebloods were passed. She couldn't help but feel some kind of vindication when they had disparaged her for her heritage since she came to this world. Well now they were being brought to their knees by her kind. Sadly, she was stuck in the thick of it.

Were they her kind though? Would the muggles even distinguish between her and the purebloods. She recognised that she probably wouldn't if she was in their position. Her mind was trying to formulate an action forward when there was a loud crash and the house shook.

They were firing! The muggles were coming in. Why weren't they surrendering? They need to surrender. Hermione took a step back as the floorboards underneath her feet shook for a second time. She rushed to the window and looked outside. There were Death Eaters trying to attack and they were being shot by the muggles.

She heard more explosions and crunch of glass breaking. They weren't going to surrender, she realised, the muggles were coming in. She covered her mouth again and stood there until a closer explosion made her seek refuge in the windowless bathroom.

The explosions continued and Hermione could start hearing parts of the house starting to fall. Somehow some stupid notion that the bathtub was the best place surfaced and she climbed in. Not like a bathtub is going to be much protection from an invading army, but it's all she had.

She could hear Draco calling her name.

"I'm in here," she yelled and turned around to see him enter.

"The muggles are attacking," he stated.

"I got that."

"We can't get out. They are stopping us from leaving," he said running his hands through his hair.

"You need to surrender," she urged.

"Not going to happen. Voldemort will never surrender."

"You're going to get slaughtered if you don't."

"Yeah, I know that," he snapped, "but surrender is just not an option. Voldemort is pretty much stabbing anyone who brings it up."

Hermione stared at him for a while trying to think through the situation, but she couldn't find a course forward.

"Voldemort has picked up some of the muggle weapons along the way and they are making good use of them," he continued. "You need to run."

"You need to run too."

"They are shooting the Deathaters that approach them. They know what we look like and they know about the Dark Mark. They will just kill me. You don't have a mark, they might let you pass. It's a risk, but it's better than staying here. I have to go, mother needs me."

"I can't go. The bracelet," Hermione stammered.

Draco tried his wand but it was useless. He threw it away and grabbed the bracelet with his hands and tried to pry it open. He was shaking with effort and it finally gave way enough for her to slip her wrist out. By the grace of being so skinny.

"Go now," he said avoiding her eyes.

"Draco..." she started but he moved away.

"You have to go. There isn't much time."

Hermione could feel adrenaline running through her and her hands were shaking. The thought of her being free was fleeting, but more dominant was the thought that he was going to stay behind while she ran. He didn't really have a choice as he believed the chances were better for him staying put. He obviously thought she had better odds running which meant he didn't think his chances were that good.

Another powerful explosion shattered the glass in the bedroom. The noise was deafening.

She grabbed him and kissed him in a desperate goodbye before turning towards the door.

"I know you never loved me, but it was nice to pretend," he said sadly.

Hermione tried to find something to say, but Draco pushed her away with a hand on her hip.

"GO! Now!" he yelled and Hermione started towards the door.

She turned as she walked through the door and saw him a last time, looking forlorn as she slipped out the door. She ran down the stairs and the ground was shaking as she made her way down. She could hear one of the walls collapsing behind her as she sprinted down the steps to the kitchen.

When she got there, Stina was huddled in one corner and the house-elves were huddled together in the other.

"Stina, you have to run," she said. "Go find Lucius and have him remove the bracelet."

Stina shook her head.

"Find Draco or Professor Snape. Find anybody. You have to run," Hermione yelled.

"He will protect me," she whispered.

"No. It's over, you stupid girl, you have to run. Its the only way," Hermione screamed at her, but it didn't seem to make a bit of difference to Stina.

Hermione could hear more of the wall crumbling outside and turned to the elves. She expected they wouldn't have much chance against the muggle weapons and she doubted the muggles would give them the benefit of a doubt if they ventured out.

"Go find the deepest part of the manor and stay there until it's all over. Then you can apparate out. Go to Hogwarts," she said and the elves seemed to follow her direction as they all headed towards the dungeons as a group.

Hermione ran out the door and started to sprint across the garden. She ripped the sleeves of her dress so her arms could be seen in case they were looking for a Dark Mark. Her bare feet were slipping in the cold mud as she ducked around bushes in the garden. There was debris flying past her from behind and even an artillery shell of some kind making her dive out of the way. The smoke was stinging her eyes as it wafted through in front of her. She could barely hear the explosions over her own ragged breath which seemed to hitch with every jerk as her running feet hit the ground. She even had some mud that was sliding into one of her eyes which she tried to wipe off and she could taste blood in her mouth.

She was over the gate at the end of the property before being aware that she had jumped it. The landing made her sprain her ankle but she ignored the pain and kept running.

As she got to the line of the army she dropped to her knees and held up her hands.

"I'm unarmed!" she yelled over and over again.

A soldier moved towards her with his weapon pointed straight at her. She held her hands up as high as she could reach because he looked like he was about to shoot her.

"I'm a prisoner!" she screamed. "I'm a prisoner. I'm not armed."

"Are you magical?" the boy yelled at her in a loud voice. He looked like he wasn't any older than fifteen. She wasn't much older when she started fighting.

"Yes, but not the kind they approve of," she said as loud as she could still holding her hands as high as she could.

"You're a mudblood?" he asked to Hermione's surprise.

"Yes! My parents are normal people. They're Dentists from London," she said not certain if she could be relieved because the soldier still looked like he was about to shoot her. "Were," she corrected more to herself.

"Sarge!" he yelled while still aiming his gun at her.

After a while another man came up and the two was talking amongst themselves. Hermione tried desperately to swallow as the soldiers decided her fate.

"Interrogate her," he said after a brief discussion and waved another soldier over that walked around the back of her. The first soldier moved closer and pointed his gun straight in her face while the other bound her hands with some kind of plastic tie. They taped up her mouth and started to cart her off somewhere. She couldn't really walk as they were lifting her arms up above her head before lifting her into the back of the truck.

After being pushed down on a seat the two soldiers sat down opposing her, still with their weapons trained on her.

They sat there a while and Hermione started to relax a little. There weren't going to kill her. She couldn't stop the tears from starting and they flowed thick and heavy down her cheeks and over the duct tape covering her mouth. She could hear the bombardment of the manor as her breath started to normalise. She could hear the stones of the walls crumbling. She didn't want to look at it because she knew it would be a picture that would stay in her head forever.

He was probably dead already, she realised as the bombardment continued. There weren't going to leave anything standing. She had wished him dead so many times, but now that it was happening she knew this is not what she wanted. Pain gripped her chest as she realised she was sitting there listening to him being killed and able to do nothing about it. He was the only thing she had left of her life now that Neville was gone. Her enemy. The one who so desperately wanted her to love him. But she refused and she couldn't quite understand why now. It all seemed so insignificant now.

She had felt no qualms being cruel to him. Well her cruelty was his alone if it was any comfort to him.

She didn't want this. This was awful. They had been tucked up in bed this morning and now he was dead and it was all over. This was much too heavy a price for her freedom. She would rather accept the bracelet than this. She just wished it could all go back. All of it. Back to where they were all at Hogwarts with a bright future ahead of them. Happy, laughing, taunting, including the juvenile animosity between them and the Slytherins. Why did this all have to happen? Everything is destroyed now. Its all gone.

The jerk threw Hermione out her seat as the truck started and drove down the bumpy road that was never intended for vehicles. She couldn't be bothered getting off the floor so she stayed there crying.

## Chapter 21

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### Chapter 21

It had been six months and Hermione had found out who prisoner 613 was about a month ago. He had been fished from the rubble of the Manor, unconscious and injured. Disfigured they had said. She had thought about him every day before and every day after they told her of his survival. She didn't know why she hadn't gone to see him. She was scared. She didn't know how she would feel and she didn't want to hurt him. He had lost everything now. His family was dead, along with most of the Death eaters and anyone else in the house. Two others had been recovered from the rubble. One of the Carrow's, which had quickly committed suicide and another young Slytherin girl which had been four years her junior at Hogwarts.

All of Voldemort's supporters had their property seized and handed over to the muggles in reparations, including all the Malfoy holdings and wealth. Hermione is working on the reparations committee, trying to establish good post-war relations with the muggles, who had turned out to be fairly reasonable even though they believed the main culprits needed to be punished to deter any future action. The muggles had insisted that the relations between the two people go back to the state of secrecy. The new Ministry, which Hermione was now a part of, have been assisting the muggles with obliterating much of the affected muggle population. The muggles had also blamed most of the damage the Death eaters had inflicted on Muslim extremists, who were only too happy to take accountability and too disorganised to realise they weren't responsible.

The wizarding world wasn't exactly returning to normal. Most of the Gryffindor families were gone and much of the Slytherin population was now decimated as well. The Ravensclaws and Hufflepuffs were starting to return from overseas or returning from hiding, and the slaves had been freed including Luna who managed to reunite with her father. One of the governors from Hogwarts, which Hermione didn't know was taking over as Head Master. The new Minister was some man called Ralf Mentwart, who had spent most of the war overseas, but seemed to have some confidence from what was left of the ministry workers who hadn't died in the war as Death eaters or by the Death eaters.

Even Neville came back for a while, but quickly departed again as he had met some girl over in America. It was great to see him and Hermione cried through most of it. But they kept in touch by owl/inter-Atlantic mail service. Other than Luna, there weren't that many familiar faces around anymore. Working on the reparations committee kept her insanely busy.

Hermione had returned to her parent's house, which was more like a burnt out shell. It reminded her of bad memories so she moved into Harry's house on Grimmauld Place, which had since been given to her along with all his other property. She had managed to cheer it up a bit with a thorough scrub out and generous lick of white paint. She even managed to remove the screeching painting of Mrs. Black. Well not from the wall, but she managed to remove the wall. It is now stored in the basement along with some of the Black property and treasures. The committee didn't feel right handing over any of Harry's property, so now she was stuck with the Black family stuff. She guessed could give it to Draco now if he wanted them. He



was the only relative to the Black family still alive. It really was the only stuff he had left now. Even the rubble of Malfoy Manor had been sold.

But now she was finally going to see him. A large part of her didn't want to. Didn't want to confront him and the mess of emotions related to him. It had all been so much easier when she could bury herself in work. But he had stopped eating now, so she couldn't ignore him anymore.

Walking through the corridors of Azkaban made her shiver even though the Dementors had all been abolished. She wasn't sure if they had been destroyed, wasn't even sure if they could be. Azkaban contained some of the stray Death Eaters that had not been at Malfoy Manor on 'Liberation Day' as the Ministry now preferred calling it. More of a PR exercise than anything. Draco and the Slytherin girl were both here along with all the criminally insane people that were here before, most sadly becoming so while incarcerated here. Once things settled, maybe she should try to set up a rehabilitation programme for the ones with some hope.

Her footsteps echoed through the halls and she could hear people scuttling around inside the cells. The guard was waddling ahead of her through the maze of corridors. Everything was grey or black, some shade of depressing. He finally stopped and pulled out his massive keychain and wand. It took a minute just to unlock the door and Hermione felt like she wanted to throw up.

Draco was lying on a pile of straw in one of the corners. He was on his belly facing away from her. His hair was matted and he was wearing the same clothes she had last seen him in six months ago. He was much skinnier now.

"Hello, Draco," she said and got no response. She waited a while and sat down along the wall a metre away from him. "I hear you're not eating." Again she was met by silence.

"Just go away," he said after a while. His voice was hoarse like he hadn't spoken for a while. Just like hers had been, she realised with a bitter smile.

"Eat something," she said.

"Will it make you go away?"

"Probably."

"Fine, I'll eat now go away," he said and shifted.

Hermione didn't know what to say. Like she had feared, there was nothing she could do or say to make things better. He had lost everything and was now a prisoner. She knew how that felt. She also knew that he preferably didn't want to feel at all.

"You know I don't like it when you get too skinny," she said. Repeating word he had said to her in what seemed a lifetime ago, while at the same time seeming like yesterday. Being with him was odd. Partially it seemed like it had been a couple of days since she had seen him last.

"Please go away Hermione, I have nothing to offer you," he said quietly.

"Like you ever had," she snorted.

She could see the tension building in his body.

"But for some reason," she continued, "for some inexplicable reason, I have kind of missed you." Which sadly was true, but her bed just didn't seem to get warm enough. She had tried hot water bottles, even an electric blanket which was a mission to install in Grimmauld Place.

She heard him shift some more.

"I have nothing," he said. "They're all dead. They've taken everything."

"I know," she said.

"I couldn't even get you pregnant."

Hermione was trying to suppress the 'What the fu..' what her mind was screaming, but in the end decided to dismiss it. She knew he had some severe issues with boundaries.

"I am absolutely useless."

"That may have something to do with the muggle contraceptive that your mother gave me."

He shifted some more and mumbled something.

"I suppose, if you were dead set on having a baby... we could... you know... go halves," she mumbled. "Obviously, not right now, because I am insanely busy." She couldn't quite believe what she was saying, but it was just coming out. She had just offered to have a child with Draco Malfoy, which was only a testament to her own precarious mental state.

"Please don't tease me," he whispered and turned around to look at her.

He had a large, angry scar running from his forehead down his cheek. It had injured the eye which was now lost its pigment completely. Her instinct was to look away, but she didn't.

"I..." she started but didn't finish.

He sighed and shifted back to lean on his elbow.

"Miss me, have you?" he asked.

Oh wonderful, arrogance. It made her bristle, but she could only shrug because it was sadly true. She supposed arrogance was a good sign, even though she wanted to punch his face in.

She could almost see a hint of the smirk too.

"You look like shit. Now eat."

"Fine," he said, "And I always look good, even in my more humbled state, if nothing else I look good."

Hermione couldn't help but roll her eyes. She guessed that scar wasn't going to hold him back. It did add a certain mystery to his annoyingly handsome face.

"The muggles insist that you serve at least another two years," she said more seriously. "Although I think once the muggle requirements are up, they will let you out. Everyone pretty

much wants to put this war behind them now. If that is even possible. Everyone seemed to have had their fill of loss and death. Five years of war seems to be enough.”

The considered for a minute then asked, “But in two years, you will be there?”

“Yes,” she confirmed.

He reached out and touched her knee where she was sitting. She could feel the warmth of his hand through her robes. He looked so thin and frail, she had expected him to be cold.

“I have to go,” she said with a grin. “I have a meeting in three minutes.”

“Saving the world again?” he teased.

“Someone has to put this world back together,” she said as she knocked on the cell door. Before leaving she said, “See you in two.”

She heard the heavy noise as the door shut behind her. She wasn’t going to see him in the meantime. He had to be punished after all, just for being an arrogant prick. He could spend two years worrying about whether she would be there or not. She would, but she didn’t mind if he worried about it.

“Granger,” she heard him call.

“What!” she yelled back from down the corridor.

“I want to be married.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and swore slightly.

“Fine,” she said back after a while. Who was she to kick someone when they were down, she justified to herself. “But I don’t have time to sort some ridiculous wedding.”

“Turns out, I have nothing but time,” he called back.

She continued walking.

“Granger!” she heard him again from further away. “I always knew I’d get you in the end.”

“And you will probably live to regret that over and over again,” she yelled back before leaving with a smile.

The End.